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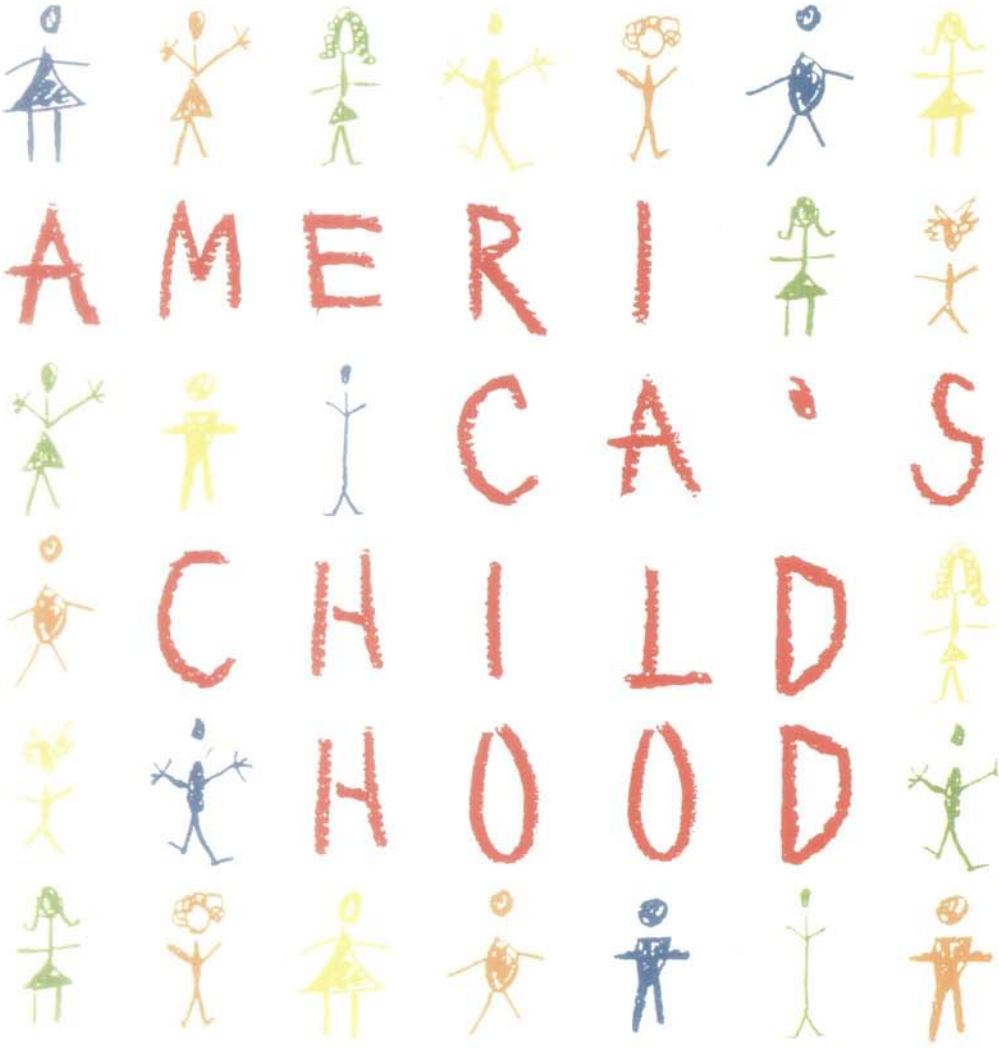

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DÆDALUS

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America's Childhood

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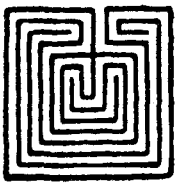

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Preface to the Issue "America's Childhood"

MORE THAN A YEAR AGO, when this issue of *Dædalus*, "America's Childhood" was being planned, when none of the draft essays for our own study had yet arrived, I spent a long weekend reading the report of the National Commission on Children, chaired by Senator John D. Rockefeller, IV. Expecting to be greatly helped by it, finding the title, "Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families" beguiling, I felt more than a little disappointed by what I read. The report, so very handsomely produced, with many photographs, charts, and graphs, offended me precisely by its rhetoric, and even more by its failure to describe and analyze the complex situations in which young Americans find themselves today. Though certain of the recommendations seemed bold, many were unacceptably timid. Reading the essays for this *Dædalus* issue, and knowing that certain of the authors in this volume esteem the Rockefeller report much more highly than I do, I ask myself whether I was not too severe in my criticism, particularly in the letter I wrote the Senator.

Returning to that very long letter—I wonder how I could have been so little respectful of a busy Senator's time—I find myself seeing the missive in a wholly new light. Why? In part, I think, because I now see the problem of providing explicit recommendations in a way that I did not even a short year ago. I think back to a letter Erik

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Erikson wrote more than thirty years ago, urging *Dædalus* to consider doing an issue on youth. That issue, published in the winter of 1962, carried parts of Dr. Erikson's letter. He spoke of the "deplorable developments" that "make it difficult for us to encompass the problems of youth," and mentioned several. He wrote: "First, the clinical direction that focuses our thinking on the *problems* of youth and assumes that if we analyze the worst of these problems and suggest remedies we have done our part.... Second, the discrepancy between the narrow focus on deviant minorities, together with their exotic or extremist counterparts in other countries, and our general ignorance regarding the general problems of youth in an industrial age."

Childhood in America—"America's Childhood"—an intentional pun, is an effort to incorporate that original Eriksonian insight. Indeed, it leads me to wish to publish the letter I wrote to Senator Rockefeller. Its aptness will be apparent, I think, if only to suggest that the country has no choice but to confront the issues that divide us—that relate to race, schooling, and families. The time for rhetoric is past; in my letter to Senator Rockefeller, I said:

"This was a wet weekend in New England, and I looked forward to doing what I have wanted to do for several weeks, read 'Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families.' I began at the back of the volume, reading the tributes of those who served on your Commission. I particularly enjoyed that of Louise Oliver. 'Zounds,' to use her unforgettable word, you had a job on your hands, trying to accommodate so many, each with his or her own private agenda. You did remarkably well in keeping the natives peaceful.

"Still, I must admit to some disappointment with what you have accomplished. I cannot see why you were so determined to tell a story that confirms every common prejudice, that does so little to instruct the nation on what children are experiencing in the United States today. I was not searching for new 'horror stories'; the media are filled with these, and telling yet others will have no great effect on opinion or legislation.

"The 'Executive Summary' sets the tone for the whole of what follows; it is not 'beyond rhetoric'; it is pure and unadulterated rhetoric, of an old-fashioned kind. The 'Summary' begins:

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> Most American children are healthy, happy, and secure. They belong to warm, loving families. For them, today is filled with the joys of childhood—growing, exploring, learning, and dreaming—and tomorrow is full of hope and promise. These children will become the competent and caring parents, employees, and community leaders upon whom America's future depends.

"I do not wish to quibble with what someone who wrote these purple banalities imagined was polished prose. Let us accept that 'most American children' means 51 percent or more, that your staff was able to determine that six and ten year olds felt secure and in fact knew the meaning of the term, that the adolescents were as happy as you imply, filled with the joy you speak of. The larger question is: could the same set of remarks not be made of the children of France, Italy, Japan, Canada, and any number of other advanced industrial societies? Interestingly, I doubt that any 'commission' in any one of those countries would in fact wish to say these things, knowing them to be rhetorical, self-serving, and ultimately meaningless.

"However, the greater fault is not that your colleagues and associates romanticize, that only secondarily do they go on to describe the children said to be in jeopardy. Let us accept that the latter are indeed a minority, that they are not healthy, happy, and secure. Still, the question is, quite simply, whether their condition has been correctly interpreted, whether the Executive Summary does not demean their tragic existences by the use of language that is curiously antiseptic, almost sterile, studiously avoiding the kinds of distinctions and discriminations that would make us aware that Atlanta is not New York, though blacks may inhabit both cities. It is the banality of the prose—its refusal to be concrete and truthful, describing real situations and policy dilemmas—that makes the whole sound like a liberal cliché, intended to give no offense to a Reagan Republican. The most fundamental question, never asked, is whether other societies in the world today, including any number that knew dire poverty as recently as four decades ago, with many of its ill-effects, suffer from social ails at all comparable to those that afflict this country in 1991, and if they do not, why the United States does.

"The Summary reads:

> But at every age, among all races and income groups, and in communities nationwide, many children are in jeopardy. They grow up in families whose lives are in turmoil. Their parents are too stressed and too drained to provide the nurturing, structure, and security that protect children and prepare them for adulthood. Some of these

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> children are unloved and ill tended. Others are unsafe at home and in their neighborhoods. Many are poor, and some are homeless and hungry. Often, they lack the rudiments of basic health care and a quality education. Almost always, they lack hope and dreams, a vision of what their lives can become, and the support and guidance to make it a reality. The harshness of these children's lives and their tenuous hold on tomorrow cannot be countenanced by a wealthy nation, a caring people, or a prudent society. America's future depends on these children, too.

"The language is antiseptic; it is middle-class talk, which is disingenuous even when it treats middle-class children. Why can you not say what Tocqueville knew to be true, that to be born black in this society is a severe handicap, even in the last decade of the twentieth century? Why all this drivel about parents being 'too stressed and too drained'? It sounds like the plaint of two young and aspiring lawyers, upwardly mobile, each with their six-figure incomes, returning to a household where their young children are little cared for by 'help' that is both unprofessional and unconcerned. Why not try to describe what it means for a Hispanic family, uprooted from Puerto Rico, trying to 'make it' in New York? As for 'hopes' and 'dreams,' I submit that your aides have not talked sufficiently either to the poor or to those who are neither colored nor disadvantaged. Had they done so, the tales would have been different from what you suggest, perhaps substantially more hopeful and at the same time more sinister than you imply.

"No one doubts that parents need to be helped. By whom? Through what agencies? Are they to be told not to divorce even when they imagine that this is being done 'for the good' of the children? Who will tell the child-mothers and fathers not to engage in sex? Who, indeed, will tell these young mothers to root out the fathers and bring them to the altar? Does anyone believe that this is the solution to America's growing single-parent family problem, endemic in certain racial and ethnic enclaves, and scarcely known in others? I know the difficulties of making such distinctions in a federally-funded report, but if you are going to preach the virtues of marriage, celibacy (or prudence) before marriage, and the 'sacredness' of the family—even its utility for economic gains—you cannot do so without considering why such sermons do not in fact cause young people (and those who are middle-aged) to change their ways. Also, you must be candid in recognizing the limits to what federally-funded social programs can and cannot do.

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"Your report is full of regard for 'cultural diversity,' but it never once accepts that this will lead parents (where they exist in the number two) to favor child-rearing practices very different from those that obtain among certain white middle-class families who most frequently live in 'splendid isolation,' emotionally, geographically, psychologically, and socially, scarcely aware of what is happening in those areas they so carefully skirt on the way into the city. In the habits that young people develop, in the care they take of themselves and others, in their regard for the infirm and the old, in their attitudes towards parents and others, they do not simply reflect the hackneyed 'do good' lessons taught in social studies courses in America's schools. Again, the differences are substantial, and they reflect the fact that the country is diverse, that its religious and ethical values are various, that the levels of tolerance for social 'deviance' differs substantially, and cannot be charted by race or ethnicity alone. In short, if your colleagues are serious about the country being one of 'cultural diversity,' this must be seen as reflecting something more than a favoring of one kind of ethnic food over another, or a perpetual search for 'roots,' said to be so important to self-respect in our day.

"Finally, I worry about all your casual talk of 'community institutions,' and what they can do to change the situation. Have you, for example, investigated the strengths and weaknesses of 'religious institutions' today? Can any federally-sponsored study tell the truth about these, as various in their commitments to the common weal as the men and women who frequent them? Did your Commission look seriously at 'neighborhoods' in a time when both parents are employed (or unemployed), when the physical facilities provided for recreation and relaxation are trashed when they are not positively dangerous. You are describing an America that may once have existed, that certainly existed in American mythology, that has lost a good deal of both its mythical and real power in the last fifty years. We remain a society of 'joiners,' but not in the way we were before World War II, or at the time that Tocqueville wrote. Work has changed, for the middle class, obviously, but also for those who toil in more menial pursuits. In these circumstances, what once seemed possible, and indeed socially (and ethically) responsible for those who thought of civic obligations, takes on other qualities today, not least in the world of big cities and big suburbs. I am surprised that your Commission did so little in interpreting the changing nature of work, but also the changing character of leisure, and how this has affected all voluntary organizations.

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"The report is nostalgic when it ought to be prescriptive. No one asks that you provide a nostrum for every social malady. Yet, to fail to describe the cities and schools of the country, and not only as they exist for the poor, to fail so utterly to give thought to the courts of law, prisons, hospitals, and places of public entertainment and play—as they actually exist today—is to make one believe that a policy of tax relief will eradicate evil or substantially ameliorate poverty, at least for those families that remain intact. The problem, as you know, is deeper than that, and it will not respond to the kind of rhetoric which is so characteristic of this report. I object not at all to 'moral uplift,' but I know that it cannot be effective in a society that would scoff at the idea that the federal government is able to 'restore' the American family. If it is an endangered institution—and it may be—the reasons are more profound than any you suggest.

"There is no reason to celebrate divorce, abortion, single-parent families, drug addiction, unconventional sexual practices and preferences—or any of the other conditions that supposedly define life in the urban centers of America today—but these post-Victorian 'liberties' do not by themselves create the wasteland that the United States is said to be, not least by those who claim to be its friends, who visit from abroad. Until the country sees its children for what they are—in all their variety and proclivity to fun and mischief, despair and fear—until it concerns itself as much with what they know, and not only from diligently attending school, when they do so, we will go on feeling sorry for the poor, satisfied with all too many of the others, using a rhetoric that is shopworn, insufficiently descriptive of a reality that exists as much in Georgetown on Saturday night as it does in Harlem, though the 'racist' talk is substantially more amplified (literally) in the latter.

"Forgive me for writing in the way I have. I hope that some good will come of your efforts, but I seriously wonder whether anything can be done to resolve concrete social problems until we deal honestly with real institutional issues—inadequate schools, dilapidated and decaying urban housing in the richest of our states, an intellectually and politically-bankrupt governmental system of public welfare, violence and disorder, common in the streets of a hundred cities, and only exacerbated by the wide distribution of arms and drugs, making all manner of public places positively unsafe for young and old, particularly after dark. These are real problems which affect all classes, even those able to protect themselves by purchasing privately what the public no longer is able or willing to provide.

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"The problem of our day, in my view, is not only the pollution of the atmosphere through the physical emission of wastes, but the pollution of political discourse, which makes real debate almost impossible. For me, the sadness of your report is not so much in its statistics as in its exhortational prose, in the modesty of your various specific recommendations, but also in the letters of your satisfied Commissioners. They speak in an idiom largely irrelevant to our true situation as a society of diverse peoples and races, with quite different and distinct values and interests. Your opportunity was to go 'beyond rhetoric,' to fulfill the charge of your imaginative title, to give something other than a version of what so often issues from the White House. We may be suffering today from a shortage of cooperation by 'individuals, corporations, small businesses as well as government,' as one of your Commissioners suggests; the greater deficiency, however, is the absence of that precious attribute called candor, which once formed so integral a part of American humor, and was so intimately tied to something called American know-how. The nation craves truth, even though a substantial part of it may wish to continue to live in its materially-comfortable world of illusion, clutching always to the idea so congenial to those who know that 'I'm all right, George'; it is only those others—feckless and faithless—who keep us from being great."

That letter, now over a year old, has great relevance for this issue, "America's Childhood." It is not an accident that so much attention is given to schools in this *Dædalus* issue, the "away-from-home" home of many, and not only of those who are obviously disadvantaged. Nor, for that matter, is it at all strange that the theme of families figures so prominently. American federal policy in respect to children, and not only with regard to their education and health, has been woefully inadequate for decades. Whether this can be changed quickly in significant ways, given federal and state budgetary constraints, is an issue that much preoccupies the mass media. The more compelling question, perhaps, is whether in these last prolonged "locust years," when so many crucial social issues were ignored, the capacity to think creatively about children—and not only about their "problems"—has not been dramatically reduced. If so, how can new thinking be generated, how, indeed, can we begin to experiment, and not only with modest "pilot programs"? The hour is late.

Exhortation will accomplish little. If we compare the condition of children in the United States with that of any number of other modern industrial societies, we can only note the disastrous and

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tragic plight of those who live in poverty. The others, of all races, are in too many instances denied the educational and other opportunities available in societies more solicitous of the young, more attuned to their intellectual and cultural needs. If major changes are to take place, there must be a more candid acknowledgment of any number of circumstances, many with deep historical roots, that make the lives of American children so precarious. The dangers are as much social as physical, and they are very often created by a political system disinclined to take a very long-term view of critical matters, that does not respond to a nonvoting constituency in the way that it might. If "America's Childhood" is not today what many would wish it to be, it is not likely to be improved by pitting the interests of children against others in the society—senior citizens, for example—but it can be improved by deliberate intellectual design. This calls for fundamental research into delicate and contentious issues, coincidental with very specific programs of action in local communities, but also on the federal and state level.

A very great debt is owed the Smith Richardson Foundation for providing the funding that made this issue possible. At a time when study linked to action is the greatest need of the nation, when "quick fixes" are not to be thought of, the Smith Richardson Foundation showed a willingness to support *Dædalus* in a long-term project. We are grateful to the Foundation and to its then Senior Program Officer, Kathryn Taaffe Young. Also, we feel a great indebtedness to our authors, ready to revise what at least one author described as the ninth iteration of his original essay. For their forbearance and cooperation, thanks are the only possible recompense.

S.R.G.

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Martha Minow and Richard Weissbourd

Social Movements for Children

WHY IS THERE NO SUCCESSFUL SOCIAL MOVEMENT for children in the United States as the twenty-first century approaches?[1] This may be a question with a simple answer: children do not vote, lobby, or have money to influence public and private authorities. Surely this explains much of the contrast between the highly effective movements for older people and the modest or poor initiatives for children during the past thirty years. During that time, indexing income-support programs helped move many older adults out of poverty while the same time period witnessed decreased benefit levels for children and increased the number and percentage of children in poverty.[2] With powerful membership organizations, sophisticated lobbyists, and coordinated voting strategies, older Americans have claimed an increasing share of the nation's resources while children have not.[3] As a result, poverty among the elderly has been sharply cut in the past ten years. While childhood poverty soared in the 1980s, higher than at any time since the mid-1960s, the highest rates occurred among the youngest children.[4]

Yet the subject of a social movement for children should prompt more than this basic political analysis. There is no shortage of words devoted to the need for reforms in the name of children. Nor is this a topic neglected by the press or mass media. Yet children's issues in this country have aroused explicit opposition usually couched as fears of governmental control and interference with private family matters. Conceptual and practical difficulties in articulating children's needs or entitlements also mar reform efforts. A historical pattern of periodic reform movements has produced

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piles of rhetoric and even actual programs that then become subjects of reforms.[5]

This essay explores these issues while also proposing a contemporary case for public and private initiatives on behalf of children. Another way to describe our project is reflection by two reformers; we want to anticipate the obstacles and avoid reinventing the wheel even as we resist the role of merely disengaged observers. Therefore, we end the essay by discussing and endorsing specific directions for reform.

THE CONTEMPORARY CASE FOR INITIATIVES

First, let us offer a statement on the status and needs of children in the United States. We invite readers to consider whether this statement seems to propel action, and if so, in what directions. We will then locate the statement in the tradition of reformers' calls for action on behalf of children, and consider how that very tradition may shape and hamper contemporary initiatives.

The Cheerless Circumstances of Children

Nearly one in five American children, and one in four children under six years of age, live in families with incomes below the poverty line. Indeed, nearly thirteen million children live in poverty—an increase of two million over those in poverty a decade ago.[6] The number of these children who are unhealthy, malnourished, uneducated, and homeless also towers high. The United States ranks twenty-first in infant morality rates among all nations for which statistics are known; this places the nation behind such countries as Singapore and Spain. According to parental reports, one in five American children between the ages of three and seventeen have experienced developmental delay, behavioral problems, or a learning disability.[7] Currently, 8.3 million children lack any health insurance coverage.[8] Risks of abuse or neglect by parents including exposure in utero to alcohol or illegal drugs reach record proportions. Children's own use of alcohol and illegal drugs produce immediate damage and correlate with violence. Large numbers of American children become parents as teens, drop out of schools, commit crimes, or commit suicide. Our society is now losing a wide band of children to early death, lengthy incarceration, joblessness, and hopelessness. Many children's childhoods are bleak, dangerous, and painful.

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These problems disproportionately affect poor children. Yet the problems of American children are not confined to those who are economically disadvantaged. Alcohol and drug abuse, for example, affect legions of children across all economic classes. Over 55 percent of children who do not complete school on time have never been poor. In addition, it is incorrect to picture children in need in this country as chiefly African-American. While African-American children are disproportionately poor, poverty remains high among white children as well, especially among the very young: nearly one in five white children under the age of three lives in a poor family.

Some of this disillusionment may stem from divorce and growing up in a single-parent household. There has been much made in recent years about the millions of American children growing up in single-parent homes, or traumatized by divorce. Only recently, however, have the dimensions of this problem started to come into view. In the past thirty years, the percentage of children born outside of marriage—18 percent for whites and 63 percent for blacks—has quintupled. During the same time period, the divorce rate has tripled; so has the percentage of children across the nation living with only one parent. Since 75 percent of divorced mothers and 80 percent of divorced fathers remarry, and since the divorce rate in remarriages is higher than in first marriages, many children must not only ride out one divorce, but must navigate through the stormy seas of remarriage, only then to be knocked off course by a second divorce.[9] As of two years after a divorce, contact with fathers falls off precipitously—only 16 percent of all children will see their fathers at least once a week, and nearly 50 percent will have no contact with their fathers at all. Fathers will be entirely absent from the lives of almost 66 percent of these children ten years after the divorce.[10]

Divorce is not, of course, always a negative experience for children. Divorce may rescue children from a miserable and destructive home situation created by warring parents. Many children from divorced families eventually lead gratifying adult lives and create stable families of their own. Children's responses to divorce vary in relation to many factors, including their age, gender, and the degree of other stresses in their lives.[11] Yet divorce also imposes large costs for millions of children, both immediately and over time. Immediately following the divorce, many children find themselves filled with anger, resentment, depression, and anxiety. Helplessness often over-

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whelms them. Many children infer that they cannot control events that deeply affect their lives. Guilt and shame may also overtake some children, as they hold themselves responsible for their parents' failed marriages. Because of such emotional turmoil, children from divorced families commonly have problems in school and difficulties with peers in the time immediately surrounding the divorce.[12]

Divorce may also fundamentally change the way children think about the future and impair their abilities to form lasting relationships and to love. Analysis of recent survey data indicates that only 43 percent of children of divorced parents say as adults that "people can be trusted," compared with 57 percent of children from nondivorced families. Children of divorced parents are also significantly more likely to state that "other people will try to take advantage of 'them'" and that other people are "just looking out for themselves."[13]

Children from divorced families must often deal with the loss of one parent and also the potentially unstable status of their custodial parent. Divorced parents often grieve for years. Some suffer a sense of betrayal. Others try to piece together a new identity. Some divorced mothers must cope with a collapse of support and stimulation from outside the home as they become absorbed completely with household duties. For others, divorce forces a search for work and an identity outside the home. Many custodial parents experience a sudden and drastic loss in income. The Census Bureau recently released a study, by Susan Bianchi, of 20,000 households which found that children are about twice as likely to be living in poverty after their parents divorce compared with the chances of living in poverty before divorce.[14] Gross income of custodial parents dropped an average of 25 percent (adjusted for family size) and only slightly recovered sixteen months after the divorce.[15]

Children share the difficulties of their parents following a divorce and may also become caught in their parents' cycles of suffering. A parent may be moody, arbitrary, or emotionally unavailable, compounding the problems for children who need stability, solidity, and responsiveness. Needy, fractious children in turn lock horns with parents who are often themselves needy and angry at the world. The tensions surrounding divorce may inflame sibling rivalries. Families suffering income losses due to divorce must often move to a new and frequently poorer neighborhood. Precisely when both children and

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custodial parents need their familiar anchors, they suffer disruptive changes.

Many American children have few contacts with adults beyond their parents and teachers, although this varies by neighborhood and cultural practice. Children's sporadic contact with adults can arise because of the high rates of geographic mobility for children, especially poor children. Similarly, high rates of turnover among professionals who work with children—professionals such as teachers and day-care workers—produces discontinuity in children's experiences with adults. Children who have little contact with adults tend not to feel safe in neighborhood streets and adults in the community may come to fear young people.[16]

Perceived lack of safety pushes adults and children apart, and independently creates enormous stress for children. Millions of children in every economic class do not feel safe in their schools, as well as in their neighborhoods. Some estimate that one in five American children will carry a weapon to school at some point during the year, and many explain their possession of weapons as a way to protect themselves. According to a survey conducted by the National Commission on Children, parents believe that they can control their own children but not their own neighborhoods. Nearly half of all parents report that other than their homes, there is no safe place in their neighborhood for children and teens to gather. And yet at home, children spend decreasing time with their parents. In the past twenty-five years, the average time spent by children with their parents has dropped by 40 percent, from 30 hours a week to 17. The growing presence of women in the paid labor force—a trend with many complex roots, costs, and benefits[17]—affects one-half of children under the age of five.

Time which children used to spend with parents and other close associates is now spent with the mass media. Children aged six to twelve watch approximately 3 to 4 hours of television each day;[18] some estimate that the average seventeen year old has spent 15,000 hours watching television, compared with 11,000 hours in school.[19] Many of these television hours expose children to violence. In his recent book on the status of children, Dr. David Hamburg notes that "Although violence has long been an integral part of human history and of child development, no generation in history has ever grown up with so much exposure to vivid, immediate, and wanton violence

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divorced from moral as well as physical consequences."[20] Discerning the effects of this exposure on children's beliefs and behavior is tricky and difficult, but anecdotal evidence attests *some* effect. One school principal reported that playground conduct grew notably more violent the week the video stores released "Boyz N' The Hood."[21]

Besides exposing children to violence, the mass media may distract children from more active pastimes. Some researchers have linked increasing child obesity to hours spent watching television.[22] Soap operas and afternoon talk shows may give children odd pictures of human relationships not designed for children's consumption. What happens when television, movies, videos, and video games provide more of children's experiences than do actual relationships with other people? Regardless of the content of these images, they cannot offer direct emotional support or attention to children's own lives and particular needs.

Taken alone, perhaps each of these stresses on children could be absorbed. Together, however, they may reverberate through the whole of a child's existence. It is one thing for a child to experience the dislocation of divorce; it is another to experience this in addition to repeated moves in and out of schools and neighborhoods. When these experiences are compounded by the presence of weapons and other threats to safety at school, including drugs and alcohol, without connection to other adults beyond mass media images, what happens to children's trust, self-confidence, and well-being? These cumulative effects not only shrink the gratifications of childhood, but undercut the development of many children into adults who can work, love, create stable families of their own, and contribute meaningfully to society.

Echoes of Reform Statements Past

This current portrait of children's needs draws upon, and mirrors, other statements made by commissions, foundation presidents, social service professionals, and business leaders. Though no obvious solutions follow from the statements of needs and crises, these varied statements, like ours, aim to generate political will to support public or private reforms to support children.

Yet, it is hard not to notice how similar in form this portrait is to periodic calls by reformers during earlier periods of American history. The plight of poor children, the dangers posed by crime and

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urban decay, soaring infant mortality rates, even the evils of alcohol and divorce figure prominently in calls for reform issued in the 1970s,[23] in the 1960s,[24] in the 1950s,[25] and during the period, between 1890 and 1920, known as the Progressive Era.[26] Writers in each period identified different problems as the most salient and also framed the issues in distinctive terms. The moral fiber of new immigrants and the need to Americanize their children fascinated Progressive Era child advocates. Concerns about youth violence characterized the work of authors in the 1950s even as the civil rights movement turned to school-aged children in the school desegregation effort. Poverty and race discrimination dominated reform rhetoric in the 1960s while the 1970s prompted a distinctively legal turn by advocates for children who adopted the language of rights and at times the language of liberation, influenced by both the civil rights and women's movements.[27] A mental health dimension threads through all of this history, from the child study movement that accompanied the therapeutic model for the juvenile court through the 1970s mental health movement, and thus the campaigns for children mirror changing psychological theories and practices.[28] In sum, contemporaneous ideologies and social issues influenced the shape and tone of each successful campaign for children. Some observers would also identify the class interests or self-interests of the reformers in each movement.[29]

Perhaps one of the very obstacles to launching a new and successful reform movement on behalf of children is the weighty legacy of past efforts in the same vein. Those past efforts echo in contemporary rhetoric and render too familiar and thus less than urgent the litany of problems and calls for action. Past reform efforts that spurred the actual creation of programs and institutions may also interfere with current campaigns in the precise degree to which those earlier efforts spawned criticism and disillusionment. The story of the juvenile court—a creation of the Progressive Era reformers—is a case in point.[30] Imbued with the turn-of-the-century optimism in scientific expertise and in malleable human nature, the original conception of the juvenile court relied on confidence in the benevolence of judges and in the possibilities for therapeutic treatment to solve a wide array of issues facing children. The jurisdiction of the first juvenile courts swept across the range of contexts including neglect and abuse by adults, lawbreaking by young people, and even children found

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walking near railway tracks or saloons; reformers believed such children needed supervision. The early juvenile courts thus abandoned distinctions among children who had been victimized by adults, children who themselves breached legal norms, and children who simply seemed too independent of adult supervision. Pursuing the therapeutic model, the juvenile courts rejected the use of procedural safeguards represented by due process and representation by counsel.

Within a decade of their creation in 1899, juvenile courts drew criticism for leniency with juvenile offenders and for overintrusion in the lives of others who had violated no laws. Social workers, probation officers, and other experts seemed unable to deliver on the promise of therapeutic improvement for children. Placement facilities for juvenile offenders were overcrowded and punitive. New theories of delinquency identified dangerous subcultures and challenged the original premises of the juvenile court. Law reformers successfully urged the recognition of procedural guarantees to protect individuals, to restrain the discretion of the juvenile court, and remade the institution into something resembling adult courts. Yet, rates of reported juvenile crime, child abuse, and neglect continued to soar throughout the past several decades, and the juvenile court continues to be viewed as part of the problem rather than the solution.

Disillusionment with past efforts contributes to a public doubt that proposals made on behalf of children will work. Critical evaluations of public policy address those adopted in the name of children,[31] yet the subtle and insightful arguments of such critics may be dulled by their sheer number and their academic style. Contributing to such disillusionment, the insularity of academic debates may divert talented people from addressing basic issues and also render important insights inaccessible to wider audiences.

Paradoxically perhaps, a recent report of the National Commission on Children acknowledges and yet contributes to this problem. Entitled "Beyond Rhetoric,"[32] the report includes comprehensive summaries of data about the status of children and families, about child development, and about recommended policy directions. Some have heralded the report as a comprehensive statement or as a document reviving moral concerns about children[33] while others worry that the report falls into precisely the trap of producing just more rhetoric. Including specific recommendations for income sup-

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port, health, and education policies, the report also exhorts parents, communities, and private enterprises to accept and fulfill responsibilities to children. Its proposals range from endorsement of a current earned income tax credit "to encourage low-income parents to enter the paid work force and strive for economic independence"[34] to a recommendation that "parents, communities, employers, and the media take mutually reinforcing steps to emphasize to young people the personal rewards and long-term benefits of academic and intellectual achievement, cultural enrichment, hard work, and perseverance."[35]

Unlike proposals from decades back, the 1991 National Commission report urges family planning (delaying pregnancy until both parents are able to assume the duties of parenthood);[36] accommodation of family duties by private employers;[37] and specific attention to gender issues in parenting.[38] The Commission's report also reflects the imprint of its time in its frequent use of the notion of "investment,"[39] and its invocation of America's need to compete in a world economy[40] alongside the language of justice and opportunity.[41] Hinting at some of the divisions in public debate over children's policies, the report strives for a middle ground between debates over individual versus societal responsibility especially for children's economic well-being.[42] Explicitly revealing divisions within the Commission is a minority chapter on health care that calls for more efficiency rather than more spending.[43] A particular rhetorical problem arises with the report's call for coordinating existing programs and overcoming bureaucratic hurdles interfering with the delivering of services;[44] however significant a problem represented by this discussion, it confirms the very distrust of governmental programs that prevents strong support for them.

The National Commission's report in many ways embodies the "state of the art" in efforts to marshal political will for social policies for children. It exemplifies five themes identified by the National Research Council in twenty-two reports on children's policies written during the 1980s: *1)* the interrelatedness of the problems; *2)* the need for additional resources; *3)* economic and demographic imperatives; *4)* the role of the private sector; and *5)* prevention as a cost-effective solution.[45] It strives to be comprehensive, inclusive, and nonpartisan;[46] it deploys statistics, evaluative studies of existing public policies, and a blend of moral, market, and justice rhetorics.[47]

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Although well-regarded in some circles, it has not made a particular splash or drawn public attention to its causes. We have implied that some of its limitations stem from its own use of rhetoric, but the obstacles to a political movement for children run not just beyond, but deeper, than rhetoric.

BEHIND RHETORIC: OBSTACLES, OPPOSITION, AND DIFFICULTIES

Legacies of past rhetoric and debates over the successes and failures of past reforms cloud contemporary discussions of initiatives for children.[48] A particular difficulty then follows: how can proponents demonstrate a convincing link between the familiar litany of problems facing children and specific proposals for action? Three obstacles exacerbate this difficulty: *1)* it is conceptually and practically difficult to disentangle children's problems from broader social problems that themselves seem insoluble; *2)* efforts to select portions of these complex problems for solutions to benefit children run into ideological disagreements that permeate public policy discussions; and *3)* mobilizing constituencies for children requires eliciting a sense of self-interest that may contravene the concern for others necessary for sensible policies.

Closely connected to each of these obstacles is the resiliency of faulty myths or assumptions about children—and a sense of despair and hopelessness about the circumstances facing American children. We will examine these obstacles and suggest more promising avenues and attitudes.

Children's Needs are Connected to Larger Social Issues

As most efforts to describe the needs of children make clear, the condition of their parents is critical. If one or both parents face poverty, unemployment, or health problems, the child will face the same problems alongside risks of unsafe conditions and inadequate attention. Societal refusals to assure adults an annual income and to raise levels of welfare benefits to reflect the cost of living end up hurting many children. Assuring each child assistance may seem to involve redressing the causes of homelessness, joblessness, and illness—and taking on the thus far unresolved policy debates over reviving the American economy and establishing some system of universal health coverage. Housing, crime, and drug policies would

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quickly crop up on this agenda as well as divorce rates, rates of unwed parenthood, infant mortality, teen homicide, and suicide. The list of unsolved social problems seems overwhelming. If these must be solved in order to have meaningful responses to the status of children, the task may seem impossible and the effort to couch the task in terms of children's needs may seem beside the point. Thus, some influential commentators argue that especially when located as part of larger issues involving families, poverty, and crime, the cause of children cannot elicit meaningful or effective policies.[49]

Yet failures to locate children's needs in the larger patterns of societal issues also produce mistakes and frustrations. Provision of high quality services for children will make little difference if their parents cannot take advantage of them. Moreover, powerful evidence repeatedly establishes that parents' health and educational status are the best predictors of children's well-being.[50] Yet policies for adults that do not consider the impact on children may actually harm children: The recent welfare reform in Wisconsin, lauded by President Bush, would deny additional benefits for women who give birth to a second child after already receiving welfare benefits; rather than changing the behavior of adults, the reforms may punish children for the perceived moral lapses of their parents.

Inattention to the larger context in which children live would render responses to children futile. Alex Kotlowitz's study of two children in a Chicago housing project[51] includes vivid sketches linking a child's inattention at school to the gang-and-drug related shoot-outs he witnesses at home. The middle-class child who feels abandoned by his or her parents is no less caught in the midst of larger social patterns, not easily remedied by programs targeting the child.[52] Children's policies, according to many observers, should promote connections between children and the significant adults in their worlds, which requires linking education, adult employment demands, and other domains that affect children's lives.[53]

Some myths and assumptions, however, may exacerbate these issues. A dominant assumption is that parents and parents alone "bear full responsibility for their children economically and in every other way."[54] Yet, "[i]n contrast, for the elderly, the social expectation is quite different."[55] Another myth is that programs targeted for children do not work. In fact, studies suggest that specific programs do work, notably those that address children with identifiable

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physical and mental needs[56] and those that offer comprehensive responses to the entire range of issues presented by particular children and their families.[57] Yet, persistent despair and a sense of helplessness by individual citizens commonly accompanies discussions of the needs of the nation's children.

Tackling Portions of the Problem Triggers Ideological Divisions

A notable moment in the National Commission on Children's report occurs in the discussion of malnutrition in the minority chapter on health. A subset of the commissioners disagreed with the majority's recommendation to fund fully an existing nutrition program, despite powerful documentation about its effectiveness, because the minority identifies the problem more broadly than nutrition. Instead, they argue that "the climate of violence, drugs and promiscuous sexual activity" must be addressed.[58] Surely, these broader problems as well as the sheer absence of nutritional foods and supporting services could be identified as causes of child malnutrition. The choice about how to frame the problem—and the solution—inevitably reflects ideological differences. Here the division arises between those who focus on the infants in need and those who focus on the parents who produce them without being able to independently meet their needs. Closely related to this is the split between those who view morals and those who view economics as the chief difficulty.[59]

A similar ideological division pits those who think the state intervenes too much against those who think the state intervenes too little.[60] This particular division dominates debates over child protective services in the areas of abuse and neglect; it also characterizes some discussions of juvenile justice. Charges of socialism have defeated proposed federal initiatives for children since at least 1918, recurring in 1971 with President Nixon's veto of child-care legislation.[61] It is too soon to tell whether the end of the Cold War will alter this version of the ideological divide. It seems fair to predict that some people will continue to identify state bureaucracies as a major problem in policies affecting families and children while others will be moved by children's unmet needs. Both groups, no doubt, have good evidence to support their views; a failure to frame the problem broadly enough to address both kinds of evidence, however, will simply prompt repeated debate. Another split divides those who think inadequate resources are spent on children and those who think the failure arises in the management of perfectly adequate resources.

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In debates over education, human services, and health care, this is a familiar division.

Marking these divisions are myths and stereotypes about children in need. In particular, images of disadvantaged children and children "at-risk" tend to arouse fear and a sense of distance in working- and middle-class voters. Increasingly, white Americans who are not poor tend to think of disadvantaged children in this country as impoverished, African-American ghetto children. Due to geographic isolation from others, poor African-Americans may also come to think that most poor people are members of their race. Pictures of pregnant, crack-addicted teenage black girls and marauding, Uzi-toting young black men are proliferated by the mass media, and even recent films produced by African-Americans tend to reinforce these stock images.[62] With these as images, children at-risk quickly appear to be dangerous and degenerate. Terms such as "underclass" and "the other American" also reinforce the notion that there is a segregated group, different from the rest of "us," who are the victims of the social problems invoked by reformers concerned with children's issues.

Although these images revive similarly fearful pictures of young people present in earlier periods,[63] remarkably different images enlivened popular fiction not long ago.[64] Consider fictional characters like Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn—disadvantaged by any standard. Mark Twain's Tom is an orphan. Huck has no mother and his father is an alcoholic and a criminal who beats him, yanks him out of school, and imprisons him in a remote cabin. Yet Tom and Huck do not incite fear or a sense of desolation. Nor do they seem to belong to some "other America." When first created, and still today, they stand as symbols of romantic adventure, youthful love and yearning, and life. Huck in particular also embodies the possibility of moral insight. It is Huck who protects Jim from slave traders; Huck is an at-risk child who is morally *superior* to the adults he encounters.

The contrast between this image and contemporary pictures of dangerous at-risk youth is not so much a function of changing realities as it is changing mythologies. Subject the pictures of Uzi-toting boys and crack-smoking pregnant girls to a minimal test of statistical prevalence: these would be only a small fraction of poor ghetto children, who are in turn only a small fraction of poor children. Approximately 90 percent of poor children do not live in

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ghetto areas. They live in urban stretches outside of ghettos, in small cities and towns, and many live in rural areas. Most poor children are not black. Of those who are, however, as a group they achieve higher educational levels than do their poor white counterparts. Focusing on the problems of "ghetto children," black children, or poor children runs the risk of reinforcing false stereotypes about the variety of children who are in need and how much they endanger society; of course, neglecting these children in favor of helping the offspring of engaged, middle-class voters also risks neglecting the children most in need. This, in turn, relates to the difficulty mobilizing adult constituencies to care about children who are not their own or who do not seem like their own.

How Can Constituencies of Self-Interest View Children as All Our Children?

Given the basic political problem that children generally cannot vote, lobby, or contribute financially to influence public or private policies, marshalling constituencies on their behalf is a critical dimension of reform. Parents, and especially low-income parents, are often limited in their capacity to advocate for children because they have time constraints and stressful lives. Many parents are ardent advocates for their own children, but see no connection between this work and advocacy for other people's children. The actual numerical presence of families with children is declining in America, so this constituency is increasingly inadequate even if it could become mobilized.

Yet soliciting other constituencies speaking *for* children raises special difficulties.[65] Even though they could be interested in causes associated with children, other groups have their own interests that diverge either from the interests of all children or the interests of some children. Some social policies adopted in the name of children actually have used children's needs as a vehicle to achieve some other goal. For example, child support enforcement often provides no additional sums for children but instead repays the state for its welfare expenditures.[66] Children also became instruments for critical stages of the civil rights movement. Some policies intended to benefit all children become chiefly vehicles for articulate and usually better educated and financially secure families.[67] Yet, a persistent myth is that only the poor benefit from social policies—despite Senator Moynihan's estimate that half of all American households, regardless of income, receive some form of public benefits.[68]

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Advocates for children make current use of "investment" rhetoric with the clear goal of motivating the business community as a potential constituency.[69] Soliciting corporate support for educational reforms may be critical whether private donations or public initiatives are pursued. Yet the rhetoric of investment and the solicitation of corporate sponsorship may pose new problems. Corporate sponsorship often steers educational initiatives toward vocational goals and outcomes and away from arts and humanities, critical analysis, and other elements perceived as remote from business interests. Moreover, corporate leaders usually have pressures to prefer short-term approaches and look to demonstrations of bottom-line outcomes that may call for premature assessments or undervalue benefits that cannot be quantified. Corporations tend in particular to use time frames that may not give reforms sufficient chance.[70]

Cooperation with other constituencies can propel a reform for children that otherwise would not succeed. Restrictions on child labor became acceptable only when endorsed by adult labor interests concerned with protecting salaries and jobs for adults. The critical question is whether the coalition can be assembled that will not substitute its interests for those of children. Above all, building effective constituencies requires surmounting a sense of despair and hopelessness that may itself be deepened by comprehensive discussions of the nature of the problems at hand.

REFLECTIONS

Evidence from the past should give us pause if we seem to assume that reasoned exposition, scholarly discussion, and indeed this publication could successfully challenge myths, faulty assumptions, and conceptual or rhetorical obstacles to movements for children. We could suggest that identifying how entwined are children's interests with other social issues will help in designing more effective reforms; we could hope that explicit discussion of the dangers of partial solutions and coalition politics will help guard against them. We also could suggest that reason itself can help us learn from the past. Let us, indeed, acknowledge the cyclical quality of reform efforts launched in children's name; let us pay attention to the vulnerability of past reforms to criticism for paternalism, racism, desires by one group to control another, and undue optimism by experts. Some future author

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may well read this essay and use it as an example of mistaken, past views.

So let us be modest in what will nonetheless be sincere recommendations. As scholars and advocates, we are not going to remake ideological divides that have characterized public policy debates for decades. Nor are we likely to counter all the myths and stereotypes that mar discussion of children's needs and policies. Yet something can be accomplished. Children's Defense Fund President Marian Wright Edelman wrote about the seemingly most difficult problem, child poverty:

> The problems of child poverty are not insoluble. In many ways they are not particularly difficult, or particularly expensive to solve. We know some of the solutions from our own experiences in this country. We know others from the experiences of other countries; virtually every wealthy western country suffers much less from child poverty and its consequences than we do. We know the way but we need the will.[71]

Spurred to examine what we know and to use this to elicit the political will, we offer these recommendations for a set of initiatives that can improve the shape and trajectory of millions of children's lives. We are not recommending a "social movement," although we are leaving open the possibility that the various initiatives that we describe here might either come together into a social movement—or be purposefully pieced into one.

All of these initiatives are guided by several core principles:

Support. Initiatives on behalf of children should be backed if they have a good probability of success, and each dimension of actual success has to be recognized and trumpeted. Americans are persuaded by things that work. Much of the despair about children, as we have said, stems from the belief that the problems of children are simply intractable or cannot be remedied by any currently proposed solutions.

Sustainability. Efforts on behalf of children must be sustainable. Too many programs for children—some with demonstrated effectiveness—have been terminated because of changes in political winds or in funding streams. We need children's initiatives that are far less vulnerable to political and funding cycles and that form a solid foundation for broader efforts to assist children.

Broad Constituencies. Efforts to help children should frame issues to attract broad constituencies. This principle is connected to the

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previous one: developing a broad range of "stakeholders" in children's lives is one way of sustaining children's initiatives. Enlisting broad and various constituencies also widens awareness of children's issues. Further, this approach reflects the fact that the troubles of children are not restricted to the poor and counteracts the risks of paternalism and stigma that attend any attempt by privileged Americans to raise the prospects of disadvantaged children.

Intervention and Prevention. Early intervention and prevention are critical. Prevention is not, as it is often assumed, a simple matter. In funding preventive services, for example, cities cannot eliminate services for children in crisis. But good programs will seek to intervene early in children's lives, intercepting problems early and sparing children many problems altogether. Policymakers at all levels of government need to give careful attention to humane ways of shifting greater resources to supporting children and families and to other forms of preventive care.

Experimentation. A spirit of experimentation should be adopted. Too many efforts on behalf of children are abandoned prematurely because positive results are not immediate. Yet successful programs in the public sphere—like successful programs in the private sphere—have often weathered many failures. Successful program innovators have tied their efforts to rigorous evaluations and they have been willing to shift gears and direction. New initiatives need to be undertaken in this spirit of experimentation.

These principles may seem daunting. Yet the good news is that these principles are already embodied in programs around the country. Much of what needs to be done on behalf of children involves nothing spectacularly new. Instead, we need to build on and tie together proven ideas.

It is, in fact, ironic that confidence in policies to help children seems quite low now just as research accumulates to demonstrate that some programs work, and to illuminate why and how. Scholarly studies, well accepted in Congress, document that Head Start boosts children's social skills, achievement in school, and helps children avoid certain social problems. Research shows that home visiting programs for pregnant mothers and mothers with newborns can indeed head off health and emotional difficulties for infants and toddlers. Family support programs, which include drop-in centers, facilitated peer

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groups, and coordinated access to services can enhance child development. Several model schools in otherwise desperate communities—schools following Dr. James Comer's ideas in New Haven, Connecticut and the "Success for All schools" in Baltimore, Maryland—have proven successful in raising literacy achievement and engaging parents in their children's educations.

These initiatives are not perfect. They are also specific, limited responses to parts of the problems we and others list in the litany of children's needs. Furthermore, specific, successful programs do not change the major institutions that serve children, and sometimes they do not affect the entwined social problems that undermine children. But these programs demonstrate that many seemingly insoluble problems are in fact soluble. The "Success for All schools" and the Comer schools demonstrate, for example, that all children can learn. Furthermore, these programs follow the guidelines we have described, and they embody important principles of caregiving that are vital building blocks for any large scale improvements in major institutions that serve children and their families. These programs are preventive and flexible. They fashion assistance according to the particular needs of families as families describe those needs, rather than according to bureaucratic mandates. In particular, they untie the hands of front-line workers such as teachers, health care workers, and social workers—by giving them the support and skills they need to work across professional and bureaucratic boundaries in addressing a child's various needs. The programs provide continuous attention rather than clumsily handing children off to other programs. The programs are respectful of families and they are comprehensive: they view children and families in terms of their complex constellations of strengths and deficits.

Efforts are already underway to expand on these effective programs, and these efforts need to be reinforced and reproduced. Iowa, Colorado, Kentucky, and Connecticut, for example, are all embarking on major state-wide efforts to develop family support programs. Missouri has undertaken a major state-wide home visiting initiative, called Parents As Teachers. Many education innovators are seizing on President Bush's America 2000 plan as a way of developing and testing the lessons of the model schools that we have described. Cities from Seattle to Cambridge are developing family support programs, with especially promising models linked to schools.

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Many efforts to publicize the conditions of children have also raised awareness and helped mobilize political support for reforms. Illinois and California have for several years published reports on the "state of the child" which provide portraits of the well-being of children in terms of indicators of health, educational progress, and social development. A privately funded project, "Kids Count," ranks each state regionally and nationally according to ten indicators of children's well-being. Among many positive consequences, these indicators enable local officials and reformers to document the need for specific initiatives. In Boston, public leaders used reports of high infant mortality rates to pressure several leading hospitals to extend care to more poor, pregnant women. The same indicators were also used to justify expansion of neonatal intensive care and other high-tech medical solutions, but that was hardly the most cost-effective strategy. Indicators can be meaningless and they can produce perverse effects: they need to be used carefully.

Many specific federal initiatives can also raise children's prospects. Currently debated, promising strategies with universal application include increasing child support enforcement and a refundable children's tax credit. Proposals for parental leave policies, quality day care, health care insurance, and improved public education are broad based strategies that can make a difference to huge numbers of children. A federally initiated home visiting program has the potential to reach millions of children, heading off problems early.

Current city initiatives—other than the ones we have described—also appear to be effective as well as containing seeds of broader political movements. At the moment, many cities are taking up issues of children that draw wide public support. Hartford, Connecticut in many ways exemplifies the possibility that businesses, community organizations, hospitals, public sector agencies, consultants, foundations, and service providers can come together in one city to deal with a pressing problem; the Hartford focus was infant mortality. This effort managed to reduce low birth weight babies and to produce a teen pregnancy program that became a national model.

The ingredients of success in Hartford are telling. The goal—reducing infant mortality—held broad appeal to different sectors in the city. For example, it was concrete enough to appeal to the business community. The specific connection with health attracted and concerned the large insurance industry in Hartford. Infant

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mortality is a topic reflecting problems pervasive and distressing enough to draw the attention of varied community groups, and affected sufficient public resources to compel a place on the public agenda. It was vivid enough to capture media attention. At the same time, it was narrow enough to seem manageable, even as it provided an entry point into the network of other severe problems, such as teen pregnancy rates. The campaign against infant mortality allowed different sectors of the city to "rally morally and enthusiastically," according to Dr. Stuart Wolff, one of its planners. Dr. Wolff elaborated: "Embarrassment, even shame, was creeping into people's souls. [Infant mortality] statistics brought up images of the most vulnerable living creatures—babies—dying. . . and this was happening in a highly sophisticated medical community."[72] The campaign in Hartford also succeeded, according to its planners, because community members saw evidence of money and power actually committed. This would not be another well-intentioned idea never to be realized or sustained. Another key feature was the sensitivity of the planners to community-level concerns. The lesson from Hartford is not that every city should develop programs to reduce infant mortality or the incidence of low birth-weight infants. Instead, groups within cities should work to articulate goals that elicit shared interests and allow for mutual education.

Examples from other cities are also instructive. Led by its mayor and other leaders concerned about families leaving the city, Seattle has declared itself a "Kids Place," and undertaken a commitment to build an environment in which all children can thrive. Every agency in the city, from the health department to the water department, is now required to include in its budget some item that benefits children. San Francisco, San Diego, San Antonio, and St. Louis have similarly identified as a policy priority the creation of a climate that explicitly values and supports all children. Minneapolis is embarking on an especially ambitious project: a set of continuous services for disadvantaged children from birth to age twenty. Little Rock, Pittsburgh, Dayton, and Savannah have launched major initiatives to improve schools and services with a particular focus on lowering school drop-out rates.

Minimally important in each of these undertakings is the presence of commitment and sufficient optimism to try something. Also significant is the acknowledgment of the interconnected quality of

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problems facing children, alongside decisions to tackle at least a piece of the problems. Most encouraging is the integration of the language of investment in children and the future with the language of moral responsibility for children.

All of the initiatives we have described here are either established or are in some stage of implementation. The following are two untested ideas that we think merit discussion and debate. First, advocates for children might push for a social security system for children, modeled on the social security system for the elderly. The argument can be made that both of these populations deserve to be protected against disaster. Paying out social security benefits to parents, of course, runs the risk of creating another welfare system, with all its inherent ideological conflicts. A social security system for children might, instead, be designed to insure adequate health care and housing. Instead of receiving cash benefits in exchange for paying into this system, parents might receive a housing allowance or a health care voucher.

A second idea is a campaign with a simple and single theme, similar to the Nuclear Freeze campaign. For example, an initiative could call for reallocating public monies to children's programs with demonstrated success. Currently, over fifty-five billion dollars in benefits are allocated annually, for example, to Social Security recipients with incomes over fifty thousand dollars a year. In contrast, it would cost less than one billion dollars a year to operate a universal, nationwide home visiting screening program for all newborns and three year olds.[73] Home visiting has demonstrated effectiveness in preventing a wide range of childhood problems. Framed as a populist campaign, rather than as a campaign to transfer money from the elderly to children, such an initiative might have broad appeal.

Finally, these various initiatives can be pieced together in ways that greatly amplify their effectiveness. A single city could, for example, initiate a home visiting program that is closely tied to schools; home visitors could identify and respond to problems before children reach school age and, by working closely with school staff, ease children's transition to kindergarten. Schools could in turn develop family centers that provide various services and that are a natural referral agency for home visitors. These centers could be structured to provide activities and services for children as well as parents, such as

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literacy and general equivalency diploma classes. Teachers could also receive assistance and support—as they do in the Comer schools—in identifying the needs of children and in connecting parents and children to the family center. To strengthen continuity, home visitors might conduct regular follow-up visits with families who have received assistance and become long-term family coordinators for a small number of especially hard-pressed families. Schools could agree to strengthen continuity by assigning children to the same homeroom teacher for at least two years.

At the same time, this city might engage a wide array of community interests in a process of divining worthy outcomes. These desired outcomes—such as increasing immunization rates and lowering school dropouts—provide a key to the planning process and a tool of effective accountability; they are used to assess whether children's lives are improving tangibly and to modify and redirect efforts accordingly. Broad community outcomes can also be translated into desired outcomes for individual programs, such as family centers.

There are, of course, political obstacles to initiating these reforms. Some of these proposals obviously cost money (although many, such as giving teachers and other caregivers more support and flexibility, involve small costs). We have described many other major obstacles to large scale efforts on behalf of children as well. But saying this should not obscure another reality: in many respects the climate for initiating efforts on behalf of children has never been more favorable. The National Commission report and the activities of many states suggest that a common agenda, however broad, is developing on behalf of children, an agenda that involves in particular early intervention, supporting families before problems occur, and at least partially replacing welfare with a more humane system that includes better child support enforcement and tax credits. The three major candidates in the 1992 presidential race agreed that investment in children and in early childhood education should assume a top priority in the next administration. This consensus reflects a growing national interest and a sense of urgency about responding to the problems of children. Scholars in universities and academies are now taking up children as topics, many corporations have become involved, the media reports on children nearly every day. As we have noted here, researchers have gleaned a significant body of knowledge about programs that can effectively address children's needs. The

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varied groups that influence public policy seem to be joining with large numbers of parents and community members in the conclusion that there has been enough talk; it is time now to do something serious to help children, and all children, in the nation.

Future historians may well point to the early 1990s as a period in which a new cycle of reform for children began. We hope, of course, it will be a cycle with greater successes and enduring accomplishments than those of the past. Four lessons from the past could provide a key to this future: *1)* do not take initial disappointments with initiatives and reforms as conclusive signs of failure, instead assume a more experimental approach; *2)* try to moderate expectations and extend evaluations into a longer time frame because people and institutions cannot change over night; *3)* celebrate small successes and nurture the sense of hope that prompts concern with children in the first instance; and *4)* build on what we—whether experts or simply people with a history—already know about children and social change, about human capacities for imagining and creating a better world. These notions may or may not be the basis of a social movement, but they will make a difference to many children—and that, of course, is no small thing.

Perhaps we have simply stumbled onto some modes of rhetoric that feel fresh and free from baggage from the past. If the rhetoric can elicit constituencies to support initiatives for children, to overcome a sense of despair, to act on a sense of moral obligation that challenges the divide between "we" and "they," to be willing to try to respond to parts of problems, and play our part in the cycle of reform efforts for children, what would be so bad about that?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ENDNOTES

[1]For our purposes, a social movement could be framed by elites or grow from grass roots; it could aim at legislative reform or mass protest. See generally John Wilson, *Introduction to Social Movements* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

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The test of a movement for children would be its ability to raise the place of children on other people's agendas.

[2]See, for example, Jane Knitzer, "Federal Policies and the Well Being of Children: The Unfinished Agenda," Report to the William T. Grant Foundation (New York: W. T. Grant Foundation, 1987), 78–79.

[3]The poverty rate among the elderly in the United States declined by more than half between 1966 and 1986. J. L. Palmer, "Financing Health Care and Retirement for the Aged," in Isabell Sawhill, ed., *Challenge to Leadership* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1988), 183.

[4]See Sheila B. Kammerman, "Starting Right: What We Owe Children Under Three," *The American Prospect* (Winter 1991).

[5]At least one observer maintains that a contemporary movement is well underway—a movement for children's rights, propelled especially by litigation efforts. See Joseph M. Hawes, *The Children's Rights Movement: A History of Advocacy and Protection* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), 96–121. Even this analysis acknowledges the ambiguous results of existing initiatives; further undermining its argument is the fact that only small numbers of professional advocates are involved and that the period since the 1980s has largely witnessed setbacks and cutbacks for children's rights and programs.

[6]Final Report of the National Commission on Children, *Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families* (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Children, 1991), 24.

[7]Ibid., 31.

[8]Ibid.

[9]M. Hetherington, M. Stanley-Hagar, and E. Anderson, "Marital Transitions: A Child's Perspective," *American Psychologist* 44 (2) (February 1989): 303–12.

[10]See William Galston, "Home Alone," *The New Republic* (2 December 1991).

[11]See Hetherington, et al., "Marital Transitions: A Child's Perspective."

[12]Ibid.

[13]These findings emerged in current research by Richard Weissbourd.

[14]See Galston, "Home Alone."

[15]Ibid.

[16]Some communities may become excessively punitive toward children. The minister in one Little Rock, Arkansas church, for example, brings forward in each Sunday service the children who have received poor grades and directs the congregation's attention to them with a call for prayer on their behalf.

[17]See Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Viking, 1989); Arlene Sknolnick, *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 101–24.

[18]David Hamburg, *Today's Children: Creating a Future for a Generation in Crisis* (New York: New York Times Books, 1992), 177.

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[19]Ibid., 192.

[20]Ibid., 13.

[21]Researchers debate the effects of viewing television violence on children. See generally Edward Palmer and Aimee Dorr, eds., *Children and the Faces of Television* (New York: Academic Press, 1990).

[22]See Kathleen Doheny, "Adults Need Exercise, Kids Need Activity," *Los Angeles Times,* 26 May 1992.

[23]See, for example, Kenneth Keniston, *All Our Children* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977); Hilary Rodham, "Children's Rights: A Legal Perspective," 43 HARV. ED. REV. 487 (1973).

[24]Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

[25]See Harrison Salisbury, *The Shook-up Generation* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1958). The gangs depicted in *West Side Story* exemplify the popular dissemination of such research.

[26]See, for example, Jane Addams, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), emphasizing generational segregation and other injuries to youth due to urban and industrial development; Sophonisba P. Brechinridge, ed., *The Child and the City* (Chicago: Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, 1911), essays by prominent Progressive reformers on service, physical care, education, labor, social and vicil problems of childhood, and needs of special groups of children; and John Spargo, *The Common Sense of the Milk Question* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), linking infant mortality rates to parental ignorance and impure cows' milk. See generally Richard A. Meckel, *Save the Babies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990), Progressive concern with child health; Ellen Ryerson, *The Best-Laid Plans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), juvenile court; and Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), Progressive efforts to reimpose order. Earlier rhetoric about problems with children accompanied calls for the creation of orphan asylums, reformatories, and other institutions. See David J. Rothman, "The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder," *The New Republic* (1971): 16–17, 36–41, 196–97.

[27]See, for example, Lois Forer, *No One Will Lissen: How Our Legal System Brutalizes the Youthful Poor* (New York: John Day Company, 1970); Beatrice and Ronald Gross, eds., *The Children's Rights Movement: Overcoming the Oppression of Young People* (Garden City, N.J.: Anchor Books, 1977). See also Mary Conway Kohler, "Child Advocacy: Youth's Right to Participate," in Patricia A. Vardin and Ilene N. Brody, eds., *Children's Rights: Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1979), 144. Targeted legislative efforts also characterized the 1970s. The 1974 Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act and Amendments to the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act focussed particularly on children victimized by adults; the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act codified and extended judicial victories on behalf of children with special educational needs.

[28]Compare Ryerson, *The Best-Laid Places,* 27 with Gerald Koocher, "Child Advocacy and Health Professionalism," in Vardin and Brody eds., *Children's Rights: Contemporary Perspectives,* 84.

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[29]See, for example, Robert M. Crunden, "Essay," in *Progressivism* (essays by John D. Buenker, John C. Burnham, and Robert M. Crunden) (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1977, 1986), 71–103. John C. Burnham's rejoinder, appearing in the same book, 126–29, emphasizes the central focus of Progressive era reformers on unselfishness, as well as the dangers of reducing social movements to the biographers of the reformers.

[30]See generally Ryerson, *The Best-Laid Places*; and Martha Minow, *Making All The Difference* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 250–53.

[31]See, for example, Andrew Cherlin, ed., *The Changing American Family and Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1988); Joy Dryfoos, *Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Marion Wright Edelman, *Families in Peril: An Agenda for Social Change* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); W. Norton Grubb and Marvin Lazerson, *Broken Promises: How Americans Fail Their Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Deborah Prothrow-Stith and M. Weissman, *Deadly Consequences: How Violence is Destroying Our Teenage Population and a Plan to Begin Solving the Problem* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); Lisbeth Schorr and Daniel Schorr, *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage* (New York: Anchor Press, 1988); Gilbert Steiner and Pauline H. Milius, *The Children's Cause* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1976); Gilbert Steiner, *The Futility of Family Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1981); *The Unfinished Agenda: A New Vision for Child Development and Education* (New York: Committee for Economic Development, 1991); Edward Zigler, S. Kagan, and E. Klugman, eds., *Children, Families and Government: Perspectives on American Social Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[32]Final Report of the National Commission on Children, *Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families*. Senator John Rockefeller IV chaired the Commission.

[33]See Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, "Children's Value: A Turning Point," *The Responsive Community* 1 (Fall 1991): 9–11, which specifically compliments the report's emphasis on parents' moral duties to children; note that the report raises moral concerns in addressing the role of parents, prominent citizens, media, popular culture, and social policy. *Beyond Rhetoric,* 343.

[34]*Beyond Rhetoric,* xxi. See also 87–89, 96–97, and 103. Other specific policies endorsed in the report are Head Start or similar programs. See Ibid., 193, and WIC, see Ibid., xxiv and 151.

[35]Ibid., xxvii. A similarly general exhortation is "We urge individuals and society to reaffirm their commitment to forming and supporting strong, stable families as the best environment for raising children." Ibid., xxix.

[36]Ibid., xxix.

[37]Ibid. See also Ibid., 259–66 and 271–72.

[38]For example, Ibid., 65 and 66–67.

[39]See Ibid., xxxv, xxxviii, 7, 12, 73–76, 331–33, and 372–90. Cost-benefit concerns also figure explicitly at the close of each chapter. Ibid., 109–113, 115, 154–57,

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215, 244–46, 277–78, 306–308, and 339–40. Even the chapter on moral dimensions includes a cost-benefit discussion. Ibid., 365–66.

[40]Ibid., 8, 179, and 181. The preoccupation with market notions also appears in the report's endorsement of choice policies for the selection of schools. Ibid., xxvi, 178, and 207–209. This idea in the 1960s and 1970s might well have been too identified with a stance against racial desegregation to acquire public endorsement, but times changed. Still, this topic apparently also divided the commissioners between those who would include private and parochial schools in a market competition with public schools and those who continue to worry about perpetuating patterns of disadvantage. Ibid., xxvii.

[41]See Ibid., 63–64.

[42]Ibid., 113.

[43]Ibid., 159–75. At some points, this chapter emphasizes consumer sovereignty and market approaches to health care delivery, for example, Ibid., 175, while at others it recommends addressing a health problem—malnutrition—by remedying larger social problems ("the climate of violence, drugs and promiscuous sexual activity") rather than increasing the funding of the Special Supplemental Food Program for Women, Infants and Children. Ibid., 163.

[44]See Ibid., 311–12.

[45]Institute of Medicine, National Research Council, Deborah R. Both and Laurie Garduque, eds., *Social Policy for Children and Families: Creating an Agenda* (Washington, D.C.: National Forum on the Future of Children and Families, 1989), 3.

[46]In this respect, the work of the Children's Defense Fund is less ambiguously tied to a liberal/left commitment to remedy poverty and racial discrimination.

[47]The report thus includes snatches of rhetoric from various periods of child advocacy. Its national self-interest language is particularly characteristic of post-World War II and post-Sputnik political speech. It downplays the rights rhetoric of the 1970s but invokes it in references to justice and fairness. The investment language is particularly current and part of the faith in the free market and efforts to enlist business support. Moral responsibility language used in the report to stimulate better efforts by parents and communities resonates with similar phrases present since the Progressive era. The one rhetoric that is missing is a new use of public health notions, advanced by scholars such as Deborah Prothrow-Stith and James Gilligan, to conceive of problems like juvenile crime as societal terms; this revives in a new form language used by Progressive reformers but perhaps for that very reason seems too remote for the drafters of the National Commission report. For a thoughtful exploration of the deployment of contrasting rhetoric in policy debates, see Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox and Political Reason* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1988).

[48]Grubb and Lazerson maintain that the very familiarity of the rhetoric used in successive discussions of child and family policies may obscure real changes in the social and economic conditions: "On the one hand, discussions of the family have been dominated by rhetorical flourishes about the decline of the family and about the family as a private institution. On the other hand, economic and social changes have altered relationships within families and between families and other

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institutions. A marked continuity in discussions of family life has thus masked dramatic changes in the circumstances of families and in the state's relationships to families." Grubb and Lazerson, *Broken Promises: How Americans Fail Their Children,* 12.

[49]See, for example, Steiner, *The Futility of Family Policy.*

[50]See, for example, Burton L. White, "Reassessing Our Educational Priorities," in Vardin and Brody eds., *Children's Rights: Contemporary Perspectives,* 129, 144.

[51]Alex Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here* (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

[52]See Sylvia A. Hewitt, *When the Bough Breaks: The Costs of Neglecting Our Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

[53]See Emmy Werner, *Vulnerable but Invincible* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990) and Emmy Werner, *Against the Odds* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), identifying the importance of a caring adult who gives unconditional love to high risk children who escape childhood problems.

[54]Knitzer, "Federal Policies and the Well Being of Children: The Unfinished Agenda," 12.

[55]Ibid.

[56]Steiner and Milius, *The Children's Cause.*

[57]Schorr and Schorr, *Within Our Reach.*

[58]*Beyond Rhetoric,* 163. This call for a broader cut on the issue comes from the more conservatively inclined members of the Commission, unlike the usual conception of liberals who prefer addressing root causes to narrow solutions.

[59]See Galston, "Home Alone"; see also William Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). This division also resembles the split between those child advocates who also are parent advocates, and those who are critics of the parents of children in need. Also linked is the pervasive debate over women's roles and rights in the family and in society generally.

[60]The fixation with this issue within US policy debates seems peculiar compared with the longstanding acceptance of a public role in family policy in Canada, Europe, and Scandinavia. See Alfred J. Kahn and Sheila B. Kammerman, *Social Services in International Perspective: The Emergence of the Sixties System* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1980).

[61]In the 1918 statement, a Congressman proclaimed that the policies behind a proposed federal child health bill "were drawn chiefly from the radical, socialistic and bolshevistic philosophy of Germany and Russia. . . The bill is intended to send governmental agents into the homes of the people to interfere in the most private and scared regions of life." Reprinted in Robert H. Bremner, *Children and Youth in America,* vol. II (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 1015. Nixon's veto message rejected child-care legislation on the similar view that "for the federal Government to plunge headlong financially into supporting child development would commit the vast moral authority of the national Government to the side of communal approaches to children over [and] against the family centered approach." *Cong. Rec.,* 10 December 1971, S21129–30.

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[62]See Jack Methew, *The 'Boyz' Come of Age—If Lucky* (review of "Boyz N' The Hood"), *Newsday,* 12 July 1991, Part II.

[63]See Arlene Skolnick, "Images of Childhood," *Law and Contemporary Problems* 39 (1975): 38.

[64]See also Maxine Greene, "An Overview of Children's Rights: A Moral and Ethical Perspective," in Vardin and Brody eds., *Children's Rights: Contemporary Perspectives,* 4 (quoting Fyodor Dostoyevski, Charles Dickens, Henry James, and Ralph Ellison to explore images of children's suffering relevant to the human condition).

[65]The vibrant environmental and animal rights movements suggest that groups can take on the task for speaking for others—although once again, self-interest is likely to be entwined with asserted concern for others. The disability rights movement provides an interesting example of effective lobbyists who took on the interests of others—typically parents, especially of persons with mental retardation—and also an example of a movement deeply challenged by claims by asserted beneficiaries who want to speak for themselves.

[66]Child support enforcement could promote actual relationships between children and absent parents (usually fathers), but there is no clear demonstration of this as a goal or an effect of enforcement practices.

[67]Some studies of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act suggest this pattern. See, for example, Joel Handler, *The Conditions of Discretion* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1989).

[68]Knitzer, "Federal Policies and the Well Being of Children: The Unfinished Agenda," 8.

[69]This also seems to be an effort to appeal to a male constituency that otherwise seems unmoved or uninterested in the issues of childhood. The association of children with women's work—and the persistent degradation of women's work in this country—also seems to be an important difficulty in mobilizing political action for children, a difficulty that constrains rhetoric and action.

[70]See Adele Harrell, *The Effect of the Head Start Program on Children's Cognitive Development: Preliminary Report Prepared for Office of Project Administration for Children, Youth and Families,* Office of Development Services (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1983); and Valora Washington and Ura Jean Oyemade, *Project Head Start: Past, Present and Future Trends in the Context of Family Needs* (New York: Garland Press, 1987).

[71]Marion Wright Edelman, *A Children's Defense Fund Budget* (Washington, D.C.: Children's Defense Fund, 1989).

[72]*The Blueberry Muffin Club,* June 1991, Working Paper # ES-91-7, Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

[73]M. J. Bane, *Paying Attention to Children: Services, Settings & Systems,* April 1991, Working Paper # ES-91–3, Malcolm Wiener Center for Social Policy, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

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The first time our family was invited out to dinner in America, we disgraced ourselves while eating celery. . . .

In China we never ate celery raw, or any other kind of vegetable raw. We always had to disinfect the vegetables in boiling water first. . . .

We had been invited to dinner by our neighbors, the Gleasons. After arriving at the house, we shook hands with our hosts and packed ourselves into a sofa. . . .

Mrs. Gleason offered the relish tray to Mother. . . . "Do try some of the celery, Mrs. Lin," she said. "It's from a local farmer, and it's sweet."

Mother picked up one of the green stalks, and Father followed suit. Then I picked up a stalk, and my brother did too. So there we sat, each with a stalk of celery in our right hand. . . .

Mother took a bite of her celery. *Crunch.* "It's not bad!" she whispered.

Father took a bite of his celery. *Crunch.* "Yes, it *is* good," he said, looking surprised.

I took a bite, and then my brother. *Crunch, crunch.* It was more than good, it was delicious. Raw celery has a slight sparkle, a zingy taste that you don't get in cooked celery. . . .

There was only one problem: long strings ran through the length of the stalk, and they got caught in my teeth. When I help my mother in the kitchen, I always pull the strings out before slicing celery.

I pulled the strings out of my stalk. *Z-z-zip, z-z-zip.* My brother followed suit. *Z-z-zip, z-z-zip.* To my left, my parents were taking care of their own stalks. *Z-z-zip, z-z-zip, z-z-zip.*

Suddenly I realized that there was dead silence except for our zipping. Looking up, I saw that the eyes of everyone in the room were on our family. . . they were all staring at us as we busily pulled the strings of our celery.

Lensey Namioka

"The All-American Slurp," *America Street*
Anne Mazer, ed., Persea Books, New York

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Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

Contexts of Optimal Growth in Childhood

THERE ARE FEW THINGS WE CLAIM to value more than our children. They are our most cherished resource; they represent the future; they justify the hardships of everyday life. "I am doing this for my children," says the exhausted bank executive or the immigrant dry-cleaning operator, and by this attribution, their grinding routine is transformed into a meaningful struggle. It is difficult to imagine how impoverished our prospects would be, how hopeless the future would look, if we could not dream of a better existence for our children. To an extent we rarely realize, it is children that give meaning to adult life. No community could survive without this link to the future, which gives stability and purpose to the energies of its members.

While public and private rhetoric is full of pieties about the importance of children, statistics about their actual conditions tell quite a different story. True, we are not yet forming vigilante groups to kill urchins rounded up on the streets of New York or Los Angeles as they apparently do in Brazil,[1] and we do not sell six year olds to indentured labor as all too often happens in Asia.[2] But on several counts the condition of our children seems to be getting worse from year to year, decade after decade. More of them live in poverty,[3] fewer grow up in homes under the protection and guidance of two parents[4]—and if they do, they seem to be getting less and less attention and comfort. More children are killed or commit suicide, are sexually or physically abused, become addicted to deadly substances, fall into chronic depression.[5] Those who survive learn less in school than do their peers in most comparable countries,[6] and are, therefore, less well prepared for a

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productive adulthood. And the conditions for a tolerable life—clean air, water, a chemically safe environment, a humane civic infrastructure—are becoming increasingly scarce.

The situation is even worse in much of the rest of the world. According to a recent UN report,[7] approximately 10 million children below the age of five die each year from illnesses like diarrhea or respiratory infections that could be easily treated with rehydration therapy and antibiotics; 150 million are clinically malnourished; approximately 100 million live by their wits alone in the streets, and many more are abused, exploited, and forced into prostitution.

It is true that childhood has never been a bed of roses. Diseases, poverty, hunger, and hard work were the standard features of growing up in the "good old days." Most infants never reached adolescence, and few of those who did had both parents still living by that time.[8] Perhaps the idealized vision of what children's lot should be, which became standard in the industrialized nations over the past two centuries or so, is a temporary historical aberration. Compared to conditions prevailing up to two hundred years ago over most of the globe, our children are still doing well. It is only when their situation is compared to what we have dared to expect, and almost seemed on the verge of achieving, that the statistics seem so disheartening.

There are many reasons for this state of affairs, and the solutions to the existing problems are beyond the scope of any single essay. But there is one issue that, if confronted head-on, may help us get a better handle on the problems of childhood: it is to clarify some of the terms of the dialogue, so that more comprehensive approaches to the problem can be envisioned. It means, first of all, questioning the reasons for the very existence of childhood; second, the realization that childhood is not a "natural" fact; and finally, that it is not something that can be looked at and addressed in isolation from its systemic context.

WHY DO WE NEED CHILDREN?

If it is to survive, every sexually reproducing species must find ways to create copies of its adult individuals, and nurture them along until they, in turn, are able to produce offspring. There are two main strategies for accomplishing this. The first is to generate as many children as possible, in the expectation that at least a few will survive

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to adulthood. In this case, parents need not spend much effort protecting their brood; in fact, they can afford to eat a moderate number of their children if they happen to be very hungry. The second strategy involves giving birth to only a few offspring, in which case the parents must devote a great deal of energy to make sure that their brood will grow to adulthood.

Compared to most life forms, humans have been using this second strategy. But the range of variation within the species is still quite large. The typical number of children per family can vary considerably, depending on the particular economy, infant mortality rates, social structure, the symbolic value of having children, and the cultural value system. In pastoralist and farming societies, having many children is often a sign and a consequence of wealth; in urban settlements from Roman times to our own, a "proletarian" designated a member of a large family, hence someone who was poor.

Whenever a species depends on a limited reproductive strategy, it must find mechanisms for ensuring that adults will take care of their offspring. In humans, attachment behavior generally arises spontaneously whenever an adult and an infant interact. We are genetically programmed to respond protectively to a baby's facial features, sounds, and smells. Of course, parenting behavior, like any other genetic instruction, can get scrambled in the transmission from one generation to the next. Yet if most individuals did not feel attracted to and protective towards children, humans long ago would have joined the ranks of the fossils.

As cultural evolution has become increasingly important in the past ten thousand years or so, it has been possible for individuals to replicate their identity in new ways that are not dependent on leaving a biological progeny. Persons who identify themselves with culture rather than with nature often prefer to leave their memes* to posterity, instead of their genes. The Romans expressed this choice with the saying, *libri aut liberi*—books or sons—assuming that the energy that goes into creating cultural products must come at the expense of biological reproduction. While it is certainly not true that mimetic and genetic reproduction are necessarily zero-sum and

*The concept of the "meme" was introduced by the British biologist Robert Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). It is used to refer to a unit of information transmitted through cultural learning, in contradistinction to the "gene" which refers to information transmitted chemically.

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mutually exclusive (we need only remember that Johann Sebastian Bach sired twenty children as well as over two hundred cantatas and a great number of other wonderful musical compositions), it is nevertheless noteworthy how often the two processes do diverge. In many societies, culture was preserved by celibate monks, and often by eunuchs. In our own, homosexuality is considerably more frequent among the practitioners of the arts and letters than it is among the general population.

As the importance of cultural values increases, our attitudes about children are bound to become more complex. When only biological evolution is at stake, the issues are quite simple: those individuals whose genes spread relatively more frequently in the succeeding generations are the most "successful." The prolific inherit the earth. But to the degree that culture makes us self-reflective, and the quality of life gains in importance relative to its sheer quantity, reproductive success begins to be defined in terms of the values our children learn, the skills they acquire, the happiness they experience throughout their lives. It is no longer enough to scatter one's genes into the future; it becomes important to project one's memes as well. Reproductive success is not simply a matter of passing on chemical information coded on chromosomes, but involves transmitting extrasomatic information coded in words, works, and behavioral models.

As long as we remain mortal, neither genes nor memes will survive without there always being generations of children to carry on the peculiar blend of chemical and extrasomatic instructions that define humanity. Biological reproduction will continue to be necessary. Rather than trying to saturate the environment with copies of ourselves struggling against each other and other life-forms for scarce resources, the best evolutionary strategy may consist in reducing the number of our offspring and making sure that they have a chance to develop their potentialities in a harmonious social environment, without preventing other life-forms from fulfilling their own evolutionary potential. This is a tremendously difficult strategy to implement, but it seems a worthwhile challenge to the ingenuity of our species.

THE NATURE OF CHILDHOOD

Because of the long evolutionary dependence of humanity on maximum procreation, discussions about children are usually cloaked in

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layers of preconceptions and idealized self-delusions that make it very difficult to sustain rational discourse on the topic. Among the most entrenched beliefs is the one that every individual has a right to have children, that society has an obligation to provide for all children, and that children, once provided with a basically supportive environment, are going to grow up into happy and productive adults. These beliefs are so rooted in the current worldview that to question them is highly politically incorrect. Yet it seems necessary to look more closely at these assumptions if we are to make any real progress.

The Right to Procreate

The popular consensus these days is that everyone has a right to have children. In the year just ended, we have seen girlfriends of death-row inmates protesting the infringement of their rights to have babies with convicted murderers, and class-action suits threatened on behalf of severely retarded persons whose procreative chances have been limited.[9] But what is this supposed "right" based on? Is it a natural right, a necessary condition of existence like breathing, or is it a socially constituted right which results from a social contract involving responsibilities as well as rights?

The belief that in nature every mature individual is guaranteed children is certainly contradicted by the facts. What determines whether an individual will or will not have offspring is not a parental desire, or a parental "right," but the carrying capacity of the ecosystem. Few fish, reptiles, or birds see their eggs hatch into maturity. Among mammals, mating is reserved for those at the top of the dominance hierarchy. Among primates, many males are relegated to a life of enforced bachelorhood. Although most females do bear children, the babies of subdominant mothers die in disproportionate numbers, often at the hand of other females.[10] This behavior is not due to "bestial" callousness, but to the need of the group to find a way to insure its survival in a precarious environment.

For the same reason, every human group that we know of has developed ways to limit the right of procreation to those adults who are expected to have a chance to provide for their offspring. Usually this limitation has been enforced by restricting marriage. The various norms that in Africa, Asia, and everywhere else required relatively huge capital investments in dowries and brides wealth before a person could marry were not quaint and arbitrary traditions, but the best solution these people were able to devise for solving the problem

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of how to take care of children. *No cattle, no children,* was the implicit rule for the majority of human societies.[11] Polygamy, which was by far the most widely practiced form of marriage around the world, restricted procreation to males who had the means to support their offspring, and to the women who lived with them. Until recently, a similar situation was the *de facto* rule in Europe and in America: younger sons without property did not marry, and women who could not find a husband to support them remained spinster aunts helping in their sisters' households.

Nowadays spokespersons for the disadvantaged bridle at any hint of restricting the procreation of the poor and accuse the more affluent classes of attempted genocide. Such critics blame the racist, capitalist nature of our society for even thinking in these terms. If this be genocide, however, it is a form that has been practiced by every society, on every continent, as far back as human memory goes. It is difficult to imagine how any society could have survived without making sure that children were raised by parents who took responsibility for them.

Of course, human nature being what it is, procreation has not been confined to socially approved forms, and illegitimacy has always presented a problem. No society has ever felt that it could take full responsibility for those children whose upbringing was not vouched for by adults who considered themselves the child's parents. In some relatively prosperous communities, such as Christian Europe, various religious and civic organizations took the responsibility of caring for illegitimate and abandoned children, but this was seen as an act of charity, gratuitous and therefore expendable. By far the most typical responses to unwanted children (which included not only illegitimate ones, but those whose existence put too severe a strain on the family's ability to cope) were abortion, infanticide, and the abandonment of children.[12] Even now, in many parts of the world, including nominally Catholic countries in South America, killing the infant is the only solution most parents feel they have.

The unwritten contract that until recently has bound social groups everywhere balanced the adults' desire for reproduction against their responsibility for taking care of their offspring, and for training them to become productive members of the community. When the two needs came into conflict, the community needs took precedence over those of the individual, with harsh consequences for the infant, the

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parents, or both. If this had not been so, few societies would have survived the resulting chaos.

This process of societal regulation can only take place spontaneously when there is an intact community responsible for its own self-preservation. When social structure is changing too rapidly, when there are no legitimate lines of authority, when norms fluctuate and have no hold on members' behavior, the safeguards against over-reproduction are undermined, and the conditions are set for a return to a state of nature "red of tooth and claw." This is the condition that now prevails in the immense urban slums of South America and of our own cities. Festering with violence and drugs, it is precisely these environments that produce disproportionate numbers of the next generation.

It is not pleasant to consider such facts. Burying one's head in the sand is much more comforting, but the problem will not go away by itself. What to do about it, however, is far from clear. Past strategies and simple solutions are out of the question for a society that wishes to maintain its human dignity. Yet unless appropriate responses are found to the problem, there will be ignorant, desperate, and greedy individuals who might well resort to unthinkable solutions. For example, a rumor was recently spread in Europe to the effect that a large number of children had been collected by an agency in South America ostensibly on behalf of European foster-parents; the children were then killed and their organs shipped to hospitals across the Atlantic to provide transplants for wealthy recipients. Mercifully there seems to have been no basis for this rumor, yet many people found it credible, suggesting that such horrors are not out of the question.

The point is that the conditions of children will not improve unless there is a social context capable of supporting their growth. To better understand what such a context requires, we should start considering the needs of children between the critical ages of two and ten, when so many of their attitudes toward life as well as their character are formed.

WHAT CHILDREN NEED

Melvin Konner, in a recent book, lists nine conditions that researchers have found to be necessary for the normal development of

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children.[13] The list is deceptively simple; only as one stops to reflect on the various entries does it become clear how far we still are from being able to provide these basic necessities. For instance, the first item advises "parental nutrition and care, including protection from illness and drug abuse, in a critical period of the formation of body and brain." But when one-fourth of the children live below the poverty line, and an increasing number of parents smoke, drink, and take drugs,[14] even this simple prerequisite for a normal childhood becomes problematic.

Other basic necessities for normal growth listed by Konner include: appropriate stimulation and care; close attachment (i.e., love); protection from illness; freedom from sexual abuse; gradual challenges commensurate to the growing child's skills; safe and challenging schooling. These are supposed to be requirements for normal child development, not some recipe for an ideal childhood. Yet how often are at least some of these essential provisions lacking in the early family context?

While Konner gives a sensible list of what must be present in the environment to support the development of children, the list does not spell out the psychological changes that a child normally passes through in the first ten years or so of life. For this we may turn to the synthesis provided by Erik Erikson, which is still unmatched in clarity and depth.[15] Erikson identified eight "stages"—points of crisis and transformation—which each person must face in the course of life, and which provide opportunities to grow in new directions. If one is prevented from seizing the opportunity, however, psychosocial development is stunted, and the probability of negotiating the next stage successfully is compromised. It is useful to think of these stages as periods in which the person's consciousness undergoes a reorganization—moments when it is possible to perceive the world, and oneself, from an entirely new perspective. Of the eight major stages Erikson thought everyone had to confront during the course of life, half take place before adolescence, during the first ten years. It is useful to review these four stages, because they define the parameters of a context that will support a child's growth.

The earliest organization of a person's consciousness, according to Erikson, is laid down in the very first weeks and months of life. The alignment of this mental structure is oriented along the axis of *trust* versus *mistrust*. The infant's first internal representation of the world

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consists of inchoate feelings about the goodness or the badness of the environment. If the milieu is caring and supportive, the helpless baby will deduce that the world is basically a good place to be in; if it is cold and rejecting, the baby learns an orientation of radical suspiciousness towards the world that will be very difficult to change later on. Faith in a God or in humanity is difficult to achieve for an adult whose first experience of life was rejection and neglect.

The second shift in the organization of consciousness occurs along the axis of *autonomy* versus *shame* and *doubt*. Erikson recognized that during the first two years or so, the most important skills infants develop have to do with the control of their own bodies. This includes moving their limbs, crawling, standing up, beginning to babble and then talk, and learning to control eliminatory functions. Especially in cold climates and urban settings, toilet training becomes a focal concern of parents and its importance is transmitted to children. If attempts to secure control over one's body meet with success, the child is likely thereafter to think of herself as capable. If, however, the caretakers discourage autonomy, or expect too much too early, the child is more likely to become insecure and develop a dependent, helpless orientation towards her environment.

The next dimension along which consciousness becomes organized involves the polarity between *initiative* at one extreme and *guilt* at the other. This stage is ushered in when children acquire full mobility and therefore get themselves in all sorts of trouble. If the explorations and experiments children attempt at this stage are successful, they learn that taking risks is not necessarily bad. On the other hand, if the child keeps breaking things, muddying up the carpet, failing when he tries to help—and keeps being reprimanded by his caretakers—then what develops is a fear of letting others down, which may result in adult behavior that lacks daring and spontaneity.

Finally, the last stage of childhood involves learning to cope with formal institutions outside the family. In all cultures, most children enter school by the age of six or seven, or start working in fields or shops. At this point they begin to be evaluated by impersonal, public standards of performance. They begin to develop a view of themselves in relation to others along the axis of *industry* versus *inferiority*. If the child's efforts in school or work compare well with that of others, if her skills are seen by others as adequate and useful, a sense of industry ensues. Excessive competitiveness, or a crippling feeling of

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inferiority, are likely to result if one's efforts are not recognized in the public sphere.

A consciousness that experiences the self and the world in terms of trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry is well positioned to grow into a vital adolescence and a productive adulthood. But is this enough? It no longer seems sufficient that children survive and become useful members of society. We would like their life not to be just normal, but extraordinary. Despite the fact that at present even a normal childhood may seem like a luxury, without a dream to guide our efforts it is unlikely that we shall make much progress. What sort of childhood would do justice to such a dream?

Conditions of Optimal Experience in Childhood

Human beings appear to value two distinct sets of conditions. The first is *pleasure,* and it consists of genetically determined stimulation that the organism seeks out for its own sake. Pleasurable stimuli are generally those that at some point in the evolution of the species were necessary or useful for survival—they may or may not be so now.[16] Finding pleasure, for instance, in sweet taste was advantageous as long as sugar was very rare in the human diet, but it has turned into a liability now that sugar is readily available.

The second condition that people seek out is *enjoyment.* Enjoyment differs from pleasure in that it is not a homeostatic process—it does not tend to return the organism to a preset state of balance, but involves the discovery of new stimuli, of new states of being that were not programmed in our genes by natural selection. Eating is pleasurable when it reduces hunger, but it can become enjoyable when it involves the subtle discriminations and appreciation of an artfully prepared meal. One of the basic characteristics of a situation that provides enjoyment is that the person feels a balance between his or her capacity to act, or skills, and the opportunities for action in the environment, or challenges.[17]

An optimal growth environment for children is one where they can find enjoyment in the activities of everyday life, especially in those that lead to the acquisition of new skills and the development of new potentialities. This is usually not a problem in the very first years of life. Children discover so many new things as they learn to walk, talk, and to use their hands and minds. The natural condition of early childhood is one of continuous wonder and enjoyment of developing

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skills. The difficult task for any culture is how to maintain that early wonder and enjoyment throughout the rest of life. In our culture, we have a very mixed record in this respect. Although we devote a great deal of energy trying to keep children entertained, the basic conditions of life—the functional isolation of bedroom suburbs, the age segregation of youth, the lack of meaningful tasks and responsibilities—are not such as to provide many opportunities for enjoyable experiences to growing children. In the average growth contexts of our culture, basic pleasures are not too difficult to find. But enjoyment, which is essential for a fulfilling life, is a great deal more rare.

To learn how to extract enjoyment from experience one must have an environment that provides appropriate conditions. The basic requirement for a milieu supportive of optimal psychological growth is that at the appropriate moment in the child's maturation, it should provide neither too many, nor too few opportunities for action in relation to the child's developing capacities to act. For example, when the newborn baby's only skill is suckling at the breasts, a feeding regimen that takes no account of the baby's needs is likely to be experienced as frustrating, whereas a schedule that caters to the baby's every whim is going to set up unlikely expectations for the future. At Erikson's third stage, a parent may err either by allowing a child to wreak havoc in the house unchecked, or by punishing and reproaching him for every mistake.

It could be said that the optimal human growth environment is an extension of the Aristotelian maxim of "nothing to excess." While it seems like an easy prescription to follow, in reality it is not. The catch is that in order to provide the best range of opportunities to a developing child, the caretakers have to invest a great deal of attention into monitoring both the child and the environment, to make sure that the latter is neither too threatening, nor too barren, in relation to the former. And as we know all too well, if there is one thing parents are not willing to sacrifice for their children's sake, even when they can afford it, is their own time.[18] Yet it is the focused attention of caring adults that a child needs most if he or she is to develop a positive attitude towards the world.

THE OPTIMAL FAMILY CONTEXT

There is no question that a family is still necessary to ensure the normal growth of children. The ideologically based alternatives that

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were attempted this century, such as the Soviet "liberation" of children from the authority of parents, or the collective parenting of the Israeli kibbutzim, have not fared well. The question still remains, what should count as a family? Given the great variety of arrangements different cultures have adopted, it would be naïve to expect that the Western bourgeois family unit of the last few centuries is necessarily the best for the development of children.

If we take a functionalist perspective based on what kind of context children must have in order to grow, the minimum requirements for a family would be the continuous presence of one or more adults who have the means and the willingness to provide for the physical needs of the children, who can prepare them for the opportunities and challenges of adulthood, and who love them—i.e., express genuine pleasure in their existence and hold their well-being to be as important as their own. If these conditions are present, it is likely that the child will grow up having the sense of trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry that are necessary for healthy psychological development. It does not matter if the adults are the child's natural parents or not, nor is the number or gender of parents crucial. Yet it is usually more difficult for a single parent, or one not genetically related to the child, to create the necessary context.

It is true that the relationship between early family environment and the child's later development reflects more a statistical than a strict causal determinacy. In other words, it is easy to find exceptions: young people from "good" families who become delinquents, and great men and women whose early family environments were precarious at best. One good example of the latter is the case of Antonio Gramsci, the humanist writer and statesman who died in Mussolini's jail for choosing not to compromise his opposition to the fascist dictatorship. Gramsci was born a hunchback in a hovel in Sardinia; his father was unjustly accused of a crime and spent most of Antonio's childhood in prison. The family was extremely poor, and the mother was so certain that the sickly child would die any minute, that for years each evening she would lay out Antonio's best clothes next to his bed so that he could be dressed for his funeral in the morning.[19] Despite such unauspicious beginnings, Gramsci grew up to be an effective leader, a clear thinker, and a man who tempered moral rectitude with humor and generosity.

Similar examples are not difficult to find. Neither Thomas Edison nor Eleanor Roosevelt came from ideal family backgrounds; in fact,

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reporting on the childhoods of over three hundred famous individuals in the study entitled *Cradles of Eminence,* the authors conclude that in the great majority of cases, poverty, illness, alcoholism, parental death, and violence were prominent features of their early family context.[20] While it is possible for children to overcome awesome obstacles, it is unlikely that they will do so unless at least one adult is willing and able to give them love and support. One essential contribution that such an adult can make is to convey the belief that obstacles can be overcome and provide some practical hints as to how this could be done.[21]

Considering how difficult it is to provide even the minimum requirements of a healthy childhood, it may seem gratuitous to reflect on the parameters of an *optimal* family context. Yet it may be useful to take the best models of family context into account because without a clear idea of which goal is worth aiming for, it is difficult to extricate oneself from the current morass.

Practically everyone who has studied contemporary families agrees that to be effective as growth environments, they must embody two processes that seem to be in opposition to each other, and that parents often find difficult to reconcile. In the optimal family context, the opposite poles of the dialectic are synergistically related instead of interfering with each other. Family sociologists have called these two processes the *instrumental* and the *expressive,* and have pointed out that parents must teach their children practical coping skills, while at the same time they must make them feel emotionally secure and attached to society.[22] It has also been noted that these two aims often conflict; in teaching a child how to hunt, farm, or read, it is easy for the adult to resort to harsh discipline and thus counteract the child's expressive needs.

Other researchers have focused on authority and permissiveness as the poles of the dialectic, and found the optimal context in the *authoritative* family, which combines the necessary features of both *authoritarian* and *permissive* ones, without having the latters' shortcomings.[23] Another formulation, based on broader systems theory concepts, sees *complexity* as the optimal synthesis of two orthogonal processes: *differentiation* and *integration.* A complex family is both differentiated (i.e., its members are free to develop, and stimulate each other to develop, their unique individuality) and integrated (i.e., they support each other and work in harmony towards mutually

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satisfying goals).[24] There are many advantages to families that are able to synthesize the potentially conflicting poles of the dialectic. Children, for instance, in families that are integrated but not differentiated feel happy at home, but are not greatly motivated to excel in school; the opposite tends to be true with children whose family context is differentiated but not integrated. In complex families, however, children tend to be more happy and also more motivated.[25]

The reason families that provide such a synthesis are optimal is because they allow children to develop their potentiality to its fullest. To achieve trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry children need to be securely attached emotionally so that they can take on the risks implicit in growing up. At the same time, they need to be challenged by goals that are worth pursuing. Children who are fortunate to experience such contexts are likely to enjoy their lives, while at the same time contributing to the common good.

THE OPTIMAL SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

It is often said that in contemporary America, as families become less accountable for their children, schools are expected to take on an increasing share of the responsibility for educating the young.[26] This trend is rather dangerous, because while families have a long evolutionary history, and therefore we may presume them to be relatively safe, schools are a very recent development and have yet to stand the test that selective pressures impose on new physical, behavioral, or social variations. If we place all our hopes in schools, and if it turns out that schools are bad for the development of children, it may be too late to make the necessary adjustments.

For millions of years, children learned to become adults by taking part, as well as they could, in the activities of adults. An Inuit father would string a tiny bow for his son as soon as he could walk, and each year the boy would get a larger bow and was expected to bring home a larger quarry—a baby ptarmigan first, then a small hare, and so on to caribous and polar bears. A girl would similarly learn by degrees to take care of younger siblings, cure skins, sew, and cook. The entire history of the human race hinged on this continuous hands-on transmission of tried and true skills from one generation to the other.

For the past two centuries or so, we have come to believe that what children need to know in order to become happy and productive

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adults can be learned by sitting in a crowded room and listening to an adult talk in an abstract language, while surrounded by other immature children. It takes a gigantic act of faith to believe that this is possible, but we seem increasingly willing to delude ourselves on this account, despite all evidence to the contrary. It is probably true that some children can learn almost everything offered by the abstract routines of school, and that every child can learn at least something from them. But it seems quite obvious that schools are not very efficient in imparting cognitive knowledge to everyone—let alone the equally important learning of emotions and motivation.

Nowadays we beat our breasts and break out in lamentations because perhaps as many as half of our teenagers never finish high school, and many of those who do finish are hazy about algebra or the finer points of spelling. But why do we expect that all of a sudden, in a few generations, every human child will adapt itself to a behavioral regimen that had no precedent over the previous hundreds of thousands of generations? Children were built to run, jump, chase, escape, fight, protect each other—not to sit and listen all day.

Even as short a time ago as my grandfather's generation, relatively few children finished grade school and probably less than 5 percent finished high school. One of the main incentives for graduation for boys in my grandfather's cohort (and, of course, very few girls ever graduated) was that a diploma had become necessary to be considered *Párbajképes*—which in Hungarian means "fit for duelling." Only noblemen and high school graduates could challenge someone to a duel, or accept a challenge; and in the "better" social circles a man who could not fight a duel lacked an essential ingredient of manliness.

But things have changed now, as the defenders of the latest status quo would say, and with our great dependence on technology, everybody needs to know how to read, count, and use computers. This may well be true, but it still does not explain why we expect children to put up with schools. If these skills are really that important, could children not learn them some other way? Why do we treat them like empty jars to be filled up with tasteless mush? Why do we expect all children to learn the same material at the same rate? It is wishful thinking to believe that children will obey our desires just because we think that is what they should do. Unless our desires are also realistic, we will keep being disappointed. And it is not realistic

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to expect human beings to suddenly exchange for the sake of the most recent conceits what was bred in their ancestors' bones. Nor is it realistic to expect a six year old from a home without books, discipline, and abstract language to understand what is happening in the average classroom.

Formal education has been a hotly contested institution in modern societies. In Europe, church and state, conservatives and leftists, have fought bitterly for the right to shape the mental habits of the following generation. Incidentally, in a natural experiment on an unprecedented scale concluded only about a year ago, it has been conclusively shown that formal schooling cannot indoctrinate children in beliefs that run counter to common sense and the evidence of everyday life. The forty-five years of indoctrination by communist schools have rolled away like water off a duck's back, and it seems that now there are many fewer people left in Eastern Europe who believe in communism after being forced to learn about it every year in school than there were when communism was banished from the curriculum. This is good news indeed about the resiliency of the human mind, and a cause for rejoicing.

In the United States, one of the lines of conflict between educators has been along the polarity of progressive versus traditional schooling.[27] In a sense, this corresponds to a divergence between bottom-up versus top-down approaches; the progressives believe teaching should start by taking account of the child's abilities and interests, whereas traditionalists emphasize the canon that ought to be learned. It is unfortunate that these perspectives have come into conflict with each other, because they are patently the two halves of the same truth. The efforts to discredit each other's positions, instead of learning from them, have led to a costly waste of energies in the past.

The early theoreticians of American education, such as William James and John Dewey, knew quite well that the premises of both traditionalists and progressives had to be reconciled and implemented if schooling was to be effective. They believed that learning begins from strongly felt personal experience, which then motivates students to search for new information relevant to that concern. Thus Dewey wrote:

> It is a part of the educator's responsibility to see equally two things: First, that the problem grows out of the conditions and experience

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> being had in the present, and that is within the capacity of students; and secondly, that it is such that it arouses in the learner an active quest for information and for production of new ideas. The new facts and new ideas thus obtained become the ground for further experience in which new problems are presented. The process is a continual spiral . . . Hence the central problem of education based upon experience is to select the kind of present experiences that live fruitfully and creatively in subsequent experiences.[28]

As with the optimal family context, education is effective only when it is *complex*, when it is a synthesis of integration and differentiation—self and other, unity and diversity, affect and thought. James wrote that learning involved two "sister passions":

> Our pleasure at finding that a chaos of facts is the expression of a single underlying fact is like the relief of the musician at resolving a confused mass of sound into a melodic and harmonic order . . . The passion for parsimony, for the economy of means in thought, is the philosophical passion *par excellence*. . . But alongside of this passion for simplification there exists a sister passion . . . This is the passion for distinguishing; it is the impulse to be *acquainted* with the parts rather than comprehend the whole.[29]

Unfortunately the idea that learning should involve passion is one not very well understood by modern education. In the rare cases when passion is involved, it tends to focus either on the rigor of the subject matter or on the expressive freedom of the student; very seldom are both of these necessary goals equally represented in a context where enjoyable learning is possible.

Perhaps the most heartrending cause for the failures of American schooling is the continued allegiance to an impossible ideal of mass salvation through liberal education. To take the kind of knowledge that a tiny minority of Greek slave owners and British gentlemen delighted in and force everyone to learn it was a noble—if possibly misguided—experiment in democracy.[30] Other ostensibly democratic countries do not carry their ideals so far: in Scandinavia, Germany, and the United Kingdom, for instance, a large proportion of young people are channeled early into practical vocational curricula, without showing signs of suffering from it.

Vocational training is resented in this country by many because allegedly it does not provide the same economic advantages as a more liberal academic education. This prejudice is based on a faulty inference from the past. It is true that the wealthy tended to have a

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more "liberal" education; the causation, however, did not lead from education to wealth, but vice versa. It is also true that occasionally someone from the lower classes who mastered elite learning was accepted on that account by the ruling groups. But to expect that mass education will lift everyone to a comfortable social position is purely wishful thinking.[31]

There is more reason to argue that a liberal curriculum is valuable intrinsically, not because it will make the learners wealthier, but because it will make their lives richer. This can only be true, however, if the students enjoy learning.[32] Yet so much of the learning in schools is neither useful nor enjoyable; rather, it has the character of an empty ritual whose meaning has been forgotten.

Fortunately there are exceptions. In the past few years, we have experienced one of those spasms that occasionally runs through the body politic, warning it of dire consequences unless schools are greatly improved.[33] So far, most of the real action has been at the grass-roots level. Teachers have taken things in hand and turned dismal classrooms into centers of bubbling energy. The Key School in Indianapolis, a K-6 public school started by eight teachers who were not afraid of trying to implement their dreams, is one example of how much joyful learning there can be in a school that has its priorities straight. Another example is the Options School started at the Washington Children's Museum, where at-risk students from the regular public schools are enrolled for a year to take courses within the context of the varied offerings of the museum, and apparently make large academic gains in the process. Many reformers, looking for inspiration, turn to the preschool system in the Italian town of Reggio Emilia, where several dozen innovative schools have mushroomed in the last fifty years. These are held together by a sound understanding of child development and a genuine dedication to the notion that learning should be based on enthusiasm and enjoyment.

The number of interesting and promising educational experiments is greater than anybody probably suspects. In Los Angeles, an outpost of Apple Computers works in a ghetto school to humanize computer instruction; at the University of Southern California, Hispanic children and their families enter into long-term learning contracts with community educators; in Maine, schools have entered a consortium that tries to raise the aspiration level of students through a variety of means, including performances by a very successful traveling street theater.

The problem is that these initiatives have proceeded in a virtual vacuum, isolated from each other. The lessons of success and failure

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learned with so much effort at each site do not benefit the rest of the educational community. This is due, in part, to the lack of a common vocabulary, of a shared conceptual framework that would make it easier to communicate experiences; but also it is simply that teachers involved in innovation are so busy doing what they believe is important that they do not have time to engage in the necessary research, networking, public relations, and organizing that would make their efforts more visible and accessible to others.

THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY

None of the improvements in children's conditions, whether in the family or in the schools, can have lasting positive effects unless the larger community takes full responsibility for their future. One of the least noticed changes in the last hundred years or so has been a transition from a human context ruled by face-to-face interactions and the weight of public opinion to an anonymous social context ruled by abstract laws and institutional rules.[34] In the past, entire communities exercised selective pressures on individual behavior; now much of what we do goes on unobserved and unjudged by others. Of course, this means that we are relieved of the weight of conformity that pressed so heavily on face-to-face communities; on the other hand, we are also unable to effectively influence behavior that conflicts with the common good.

It is not that public opinion has lost its force; it has just become more anonymous and centralized. In the past, neighbors developed norms they thought necessary to preserve their way of life, and pressured each other to conform. Now norms are created by the mass media to advance special economic interests vested in commercial products and life-styles. Community now means that we all agree that it is important to drive shiny cars, use dry deodorants, and mow green lawns. Whether we agree to have only the children we can support, or not to abuse the ones we have, has become less of a common concern, and none of our neighbors' business. Neighbors can force us to cut our lawn to community standards, but they cannot interfere if we beat our children.

Part of the problem is that communities have been destroyed by the physical dislocations brought about by industrial technology. For most of human evolution, the lucky and the disadvantaged have lived together in close proximity. Even as late as the Renaissance, the

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Medici palace was surrounded by the homes of craftsmen and the hovels of the *popolo minuto*. The rich and powerful could not entirely disregard or forget the peasants who they saw daily, even if they could justify their supremacy by the most benighted ideology. Self-preservation still dictated that they should take some responsibility for the lives of their poor neighbors.

When steam and later electricity made it possible to concentrate huge numbers of workers into factories, and automobiles allowed the segregation of residential communities, the stage was set for the horrible slums that now exist everywhere—but are out of the sight and minds of the affluent.[35] The culture of the slums is not one that supports a healthy childhood.[36] Being insulated from the rest of society, lacking internal hierarchy and structure, their values by necessity are not applicable outside their borders. Thus it is not unusual for talented African-American children who become interested in learning academic subjects to be ostracized by their peers for trying to act "white." Similarly, British working-class boys who enjoy studying get harassed for trying to be better than they should be.[37]

But the breakdown of community goes much further than the anomie of the slum. It flourishes in Manhattan condos and affluent suburbs, accelerated by the individualistic ideology of the last few centuries. It is difficult to imagine nowadays anyone saying, with Marcus Aurelius, "What I do I do always with the community in mind."[38] We are no longer attached to a particular place, to people who feel responsible for us and for whom we feel responsible. If we do not like what is happening, we can always move on to somewhere else. The peculiar loneliness and narcissism of our times is a result of this breakdown, as well as the devastation we have been visiting on the environment. The "tragedy of the commons" is that when each person's self-interest dictates that he or she should appropriate as many resources as possible, everyone ends up suffering. With greed as the only norm, adults and children are reduced to the least common denominator of what it means to be human. The Greeks had a clearer idea of how impoverished a life outside the community can be; they called "idiots" those who lived outside the norms of their peers.

Every individual must question the values and norms of the community, and there are times when one must stand up in opposition to the group, whatever the personal costs. But even our precious individuality is the result of interacting with others in a mutually

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binding relationship. C. S. Pierce and Karl Popper saw community as the basis of epistemology: our sense of what is real and what is true comes from matching our individual experience with the experiences of others; Hannah Arendt believed that we create our selves through action in the "public sphere," with its unique opportunities for learning about ourselves from the feedback given by impartial others.[39]

In the dialectic interaction between individual and community, the latter has been almost completely neglected. Yet it is impossible to provide a context for a healthy childhood either in the family or in the schools unless we first reestablish the ties that sustain these institutions in the broader context of the community. Laws and federal programs will not make parents more responsible. Only the involved concern, the pressures, and help of other human beings who are in the same boat will. Educational theory and research, money and expertise will not improve our schools until citizens decide to take seriously what is happening to the children in their community, and take action.

"Democracy," claims a recent book, "means paying attention."[40] The same can be said about community: unless people are willing to attend to each other's values and concerns, and try to reconcile differences for the sake of a common good, there is not going to be a viable community. But attention is a scarce commodity. As we have seen earlier, fathers generally cannot spare more than a few minutes a day for their own children. How much more can they spare for their neighbors' concerns? With over a hundred cable channels at our disposal to absorb attention, how much do we have left to deal with reality?

Persons who are willing to invest attention in the creation of a community are likely to trust their neighbors, to have a sense of autonomy, initiative, and industry—in fact, they are likely to be those individuals whose childhood conditions resembled the ideal. So the causal process is circular: an effective problem-solving community is needed to provide optimal conditions for childhood growth, but optimal childhood conditions are needed to have an effective community. In organic systems this is often the case; one must somehow cut into the circle of causality to get the process on the right track, and then keep it going.

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It would be beyond the scope of this essay—not to mention the competence of the writer—to try developing guidelines for the reestablishment of viable communities under present social conditions. The point to be made here is that without manageable face-to-face groups who take responsibility for the common welfare, it is unlikely that the conditions for optimal childhood growth will be attained. These conditions include: a realistic ratio of births to environmental resources; a context of responsible parental care; a context for appropriate psychological development, including a sense of trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry; and finally, a context that allows enjoyable growth to occur. How to create communities that will make such contexts possible is, to paraphrase Rudyard Kipling, another story.

ENDNOTES

[1]Reports about death squads operating in Brazil to eliminate homeless children began to reach international human-rights organizations a few years ago. Prior to the 1992 Mardi Gras festivities in Rio, the press had been reporting widespread killing of street children who might have interfered with the tourist trade.

[2]Ulrich Schmetzer has provided extensive coverage on child prostitution and slave labor in contemporary Asia. See the *Chicago Tribune,* 17, 18, 20, 21 November 1991.

[3]According to some estimates, by 1990 about 13 million children lived below the poverty line; see M. Konner, *Childhood* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991). According to others, it is one out of four children in the United States.

[4]At present, 10.1 million families are headed by a single parent, usually the mother. This corresponds to about one-third of all families with children, and is a 300 percent increase since 1970. *Chicago Tribune,* 23 April 1992. It is predicted that by the turn of the century, half the children will grow up in single-parent families. R. A. Brandwein, "After Divorce: A Focus on Single-Parent Families," *Urban and Social Change Review* 10 (1977): 21–25. Live births to unmarried mothers in 1950 were 141,600, or 3.9 percent of total births; by 1988 they were 1,005,299 or 25.7 percent of all births—a 600 percent increase in about a generation. *Child Development and the Cycle of Poverty* (Chicago: The Ounce of Prevention Fund, 1990).

[5]Child abuse and neglect reports have increased from an estimated 669,000 in 1976 to 2,178,000 ten years later, a 300 percent increase according to the *Highlights of Official Aggregate Child Neglect and Abuse Reporting* (Washington, D.C.: American Humane Association, 1987). Generally, statistics on social pathology tend to show a 300 percent increase in the last twenty to thirty years. M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York:

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Harper & Row, 1990), 13–15. Some of the data on these worsening trends can be found in the *Social Indicators* and the *Statistical Abstracts* published by the US Department of Commerce; in the *Vital Statistics of the United States* published by the US Department of Health and Human Services; and in the *Uniform Crime Reports* published by the US Department of Justice.

[6]In a series of studies comparing arithmetic performance between US and East Asian first graders, J. W. Stigler, S. Lee, and H. W. Stevenson conclude: "The deficiencies displayed by the American children were more serious than we expected. There was no area in which they were competitive with the children from Japan and Taiwan . . . The situation did not improve between the first and the fifth grades. Indeed, the status of the American children relative to the Chinese and Japanese children deteriorated." J. W. Stigler, S. Lee, and H. W. Stevenson, *Mathematical Knowledge* (Reston, Va.: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 1990). Every comparative study of American children's academic performance comes up with similar conclusions. According to a recently published 1990 survey, of 20,000 American schoolchildren, only 51 percent of eighth graders knew that the sun "rises" in the East and "sets" in the West. *Science Report Card* (1992).

[7]United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *The State of the World's Children 1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[8]It is estimated that in the poorer districts of eighteenth-century France, about half of all the children born were abandoned and similar patterns obtained in other comparable cultures. In colonial America, one of every five thirteen year olds had lost both parents. See V. L. Getis and M. A. Vinovskis, "History of Child Care in the United States Before 1950," in M. E. Lamb et al., eds., *Child Care in Context* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1992).

[9]Changing values towards the right to bear children are reflected in two landmark Supreme Court decisions. The one formulated by Justice Holmes in 1927 introduced the idea that "three generations of imbeciles are enough" in allowing the State of Virginia to sterilize a "feeble minded" inmate whose mother and daughter were also retarded. Buck v. Bell, 274 U.S. 200, 207 (1927). Fifteen years later, however, the tide had turned and the Court decided that the State of Oklahoma had no right to sterilize Mr. Skinner, who was a "three-time loser" and a chicken thief. Skinner v. Oklahoma ex rel Williamson, 316 U.S. 535 (1942). See also Roger B. Dworkin, *Limits: The Role of the Law in Bioethical Decision Making* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, forthcoming).

[10]Correlations between mother's dominance rank and reproductive success have been reported for macaques (D. S. Sade et al., "Population Dynamics in Relation to Social Structure on Cayo Santiago," *Yearbook of Physical Anthropology* 20 (1977): 253–62) and gelada monkeys (R. I. Dunbar and E. P. Dunbar, "Dominance and Reproductive Success Among Female Gelada Baboons," *Nature* 266 (1977): 351). For free-ranging baboons, the evidence is contradictory. See J. Altmann, *Baboon Mothers and Infants* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 37. For humans, see the classic study on infant survival in different socioeconomic classes by P. M. Hauser and O. D. Duncan, *The Study of Population* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959).

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[11]One among hundreds of possible examples involves the Gusii of West Africa, and is reported by R. A. Levine, "Adulthood Among the Gusii," in N. Smelser and E. Erikson, eds., *Themes of Work and Love* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 77–104. "For a typical young man, the timing of his marriage is uncertain; it depends on his family's wealth, his patriarch's willingness to permit him the use of cattle . . . Wealthy and fortunate young men may be married by age twenty, whereas unfortunates must postpone it until they are able to raise the bridewealth inside the family or through their own efforts—often until thirty or later." In fact, for the Gusii, "economic and reproductive careers were inseparable." So much for the romantic notion that love and procreation in precapitalist societies are free and spontaneous.

[12]See, for instance, M. A. Vinovskis, "Historical Perspectives on the Development of the Family and Parent-Child Interactions," in J. B. Lancaster et al., eds., *Parenting Across the Life Span* (New York: De Gruyter, 1987).

[13]M. Konner, *Childhood* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991), 414.

[14]L. Tiger, *The Pursuit of Pleasure* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1992).

[15]Erikson's classic statement of his theory is in *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1950).

[16]The evolution of pleasure is dealt with by M. Cabanac, "The Physiological Role of Pleasure," *Science* 173 (1971): 1103–107; R. W. Burhoe, "Pleasure and Reason as Adaptations to Nature's Requirements," *Zygon* 17 (2) (1982): 113–31; and Tiger, *The Pursuit of Pleasure.*

[17]A full discussion of the conditions of enjoyment—or *flow*—can be found in M. Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1992).

[18]In a recent study of adolescents, it was found that average urban teenagers spent about 3 minutes a day alone with their fathers—and half of that time was spent watching television. See M. Csikszentmihalyi and R. Larson, *Being Adolescent: Conflict and Growth in the Teenage Years* (New York: Basic Books, 1986). It is unlikely that younger children spend more time with their fathers, who is often the only adult male with whom they interact at all.

[19]G. Fiore, *Antonio Gramsci: Life of a revolutionary* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973).

[20]V. Goertzel and M. G. Goertzel, *Cradles of Eminence* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1962).

[21]For studies of how obstacles in early family environment can be overcome through the mediation of cultural models provided within the family, see O. E. Beattie and M. Csikszentmihalyi, "On the Socialization Influence of Books," *Child Psychology and Human Development* 11 (1981): 1, 3–18.

[22]See, for example, T. Parson and R. F. Bales, *Family, Socialization, and Interaction Process* (New York: Free Press, 1955).

[23]Baumrind, "A Developmental Perspective on Adolescent Risk-Taking Behavior in Contemporary America," in C. E. Irwin, ed., *Adolescent Social Behavior and Health* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

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[24]K. Rathunde, "The context of optimal experience: an exploratory model of the family," *New Ideas in Psychology* 7 (1989): 91–97; and K. Rathunde and M. Csikszentmihalyi, "Adolescent happiness and family interaction," in K. Pillmer and K. McCartney, eds., *Parent-Child Relationships Through Life* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1991).

[25]M. Csikszentmihalyi, K. Rathunde, and S. Whalen, *Talented Teenagers: A Longitudinal Study of Their Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[26]For instance, Vinovskis concludes his historical comparison of schooling in America as follows: "Compared to our colonial or 19th-century ancestors, most parents today neglect their responsibility and role as educators in the home." M. A. Vinovskis, "Schooling and Poor Children in 19th-Century America," *American Behavioral Scientist* 35 (3) (1992): 327.

[27]For a history of this dialectic, see Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the Schools* (New York: Vintage, 1961) and George Geahigan, "The Arts in Education: A Historical Perspective," in B. Reimer and R. A. Smith, eds., *The Arts, Education, and Aesthetic Knowing*, 91st Yearbook of the NSSE (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1–19.

[28]John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 79, 27.

[29]William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, [1950], 1890), 126–27.

[30]For a recent account of universal mass education in the United States, see Lawrence Cremin, *Popular Education and Its Discontents* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990).

[31]See, for instance, S. Bowles and H. Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).

[32]Arguments for the importance of enjoyment in learning were advanced by this author in an earlier issue of *Dædalus*. See M. Csikszentmihalyi, "Literacy and Intrinsic Motivation,"*Dædalus* 119 (2) (1990): 115–40.

[33]The most recent flap is centered around the competitive disadvantage American children are acquiring compared to children taught in Asian and European schools. This has prompted the White House to fund educational initiatives based on collaboration between the private and public sector, and Congress to support more educational innovations. Perhaps the last awakening before the present one was in the late 1950s, when the launching of Sputnik convinced many of us that the Soviet educational system was producing better scientists, and prompted our government to enact several measures to support schools. It is fair to say that so far neither of these reactions resulted in a radical reevaluation of what education should be about.

[34]For a recent treatment of the force of public opinion, see Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, *The Spiral of Silence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[35]E. P. Thompson provides an excellent description of the destruction of English working communities in *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Viking, 1963).

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[36]The concept of a "culture of poverty" was introduced by the anthropologist Oscar Lewis, *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in the Culture of Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1959). For a more contemporary treatment of the same theme, see W. J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[37]*Time,* April 1992.

[38]Quoted in J. Hillman and M. Ventura, *A Hundred Years of Psychotherapy—and The World is Getting Worse* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 35.

[39]In addition to the works of George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, Peter Berger, and Thomas Luckmann, see in particular C. S. Peirce, *The Collected Works of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931–1935); Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Harper, 1965); and Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958).

[40]R. N. Bellah, R. Madsen, W. M. Sullivan, A. Swidler, and S. M. Tipton, *The Good Society* (New York: A. Knopf, 1991).

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Sandra K. Danziger and Sheldon Danziger

Child Poverty and Public Policy: Toward a Comprehensive Antipoverty Agenda

MUCH ATTENTION HAS BEEN FOCUSED recently on the economic well-being of children, particularly on the fact that the child poverty rate remains so high after the economic recovery of the 1980s, and so high relative to the rate in other industrialized countries. This current interest reflects a familiar cycle, as national reports emphasizing the importance of child poverty have appeared in 1909, 1930, 1970, and 1991.[1]

A recent film, *Grand Canyon,* portrays the effects that child poverty has on young people and highlights "the paradox of poverty amidst plenty" that characterizes poverty in America. It reveals contemporary differences in socioeconomic, environmental, and familial opportunities through the stories of two male teenagers. One, an African-American, lives in the inner city with his single mother, and spends an embattled summer coping with gang rivalry, police racism, and economic hardship. The other, who is white, lives in a spacious suburban home with both of his parents, and spends an idyllic summer away at camp.

This discrepancy in life options was exacerbated during the 1980s and early 1990s as the gap between the "haves and the have-nots" widened and child poverty increased. By the late 1980s, over four-in-ten minority children and one-in-five of all American children were poor. These high poverty rates have no parallel in Canada, where child poverty rates are less than 10 percent, or in Northern Europe, where they are less than 5 percent. In addition, child poverty in these other countries has continued to fall during the 1980s, even though they have experienced similar economic and demographic changes.[2]

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This paper is organized as follows. In the first sections, we describe recent economic trends among families in general and poor families in particular. We analyze the proximate causes of child poverty and the extent to which it can be attributed to economic changes, changes in living arrangements, and changes in public welfare programs.

Then, we present a model of the consequences of poverty and of the processes through which poverty affects the life chances of children. Because of family stresses and restricted opportunities, a poor child's ability to become a successful adult is diminished. Here we discuss interventions designed to reduce these stresses and to expand family opportunities.

We conclude by outlining the components of a comprehensive antipoverty agenda designed to reduce the chances of becoming poor, to reduce the negative impacts of poverty on the physical, emotional, social, and cognitive health of children and adolescents, and to expand the opportunities available in poor communities. If such an antipoverty agenda is not implemented, child poverty will remain high as we enter the twenty-first century.

MACROECONOMIC CHANGES AND FAMILY INCOMES: 1949 TO PRESENT

The economic hardship that affects so many American children represents a sharp break with our recent economic history. We remain in the midst of an unusual period in which a new generation of children is not much better off on average than the preceding generation, and in which a substantial portion of this generation is actually worse off. The contrast between these generations is even more remarkable because the rapid economic gains for children in the twenty-five years following World War II coincided with the "baby boom," when there were relatively more children and fewer workers per family. Today, in the wake of the "baby bust," children comprise a smaller percentage of the population, and there are more workers per family due to the dramatic increase in the labor-force participation of married women. Nonetheless, children remain as likely to be poor as they were two decades ago.

Median family income for American families grew almost continuously from 1949 through 1973. During that twenty-five year period, year-to-year changes in median income were positive twenty times, and negative only four times. The inflation-adjusted median increased by 43 percent between 1949 and 1959, by another 40 percent between

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1959 and 1969, and just about doubled between 1949 and 1973. Because of this rapid growth, child poverty dropped dramatically. Beginning from an unofficial estimate of close to 50 percent in 1949, it was halved by 1959, and almost halved again by 1973.[3]

If there were ever a period that could be called "the good old days," this was it with respect to family income and child poverty. In fact, the post-World War II boom was so robust that its continuation was taken for granted when the War on Poverty was declared. In the *Economic Report of the President, 1967*, the Council of Economic Advisers noted that "The United States is the first large nation in the history of the world wealthy enough to end poverty within its borders."[4] At the time, the United States was much richer than it had been two decades earlier, and much richer than any other country.

This is no longer true. The oil shock of 1973 signalled the end of a quarter century of rising living standards, and challenged optimistic notions that American incomes would continue to grow and to exceed those of other nations. Since that year, family income growth has slowed dramatically and there have been about as many year-to-year declines as increases in the median. Frank Levy[5] refers to the 1973–1982 period as the "quiet depression," because it marked the first sustained decline in American living standards since the Great Depression of the 1930s. During this decade, median family income fell slightly and child poverty rose rapidly.

During the recovery that began in November 1982 and ended in July 1990, median family income recovered the ground lost during the "quiet depression." Nonetheless, median income for all families in 1989 was only 8 percent higher than in 1973, and child poverty fell only slightly, remaining well above the 1973 rate.[6] Poverty fell so little during the economic recovery of the 1980s because the income gains generated were highly concentrated among the most advantaged families. Demographic groups with below-average incomes and relatively high poverty rates benefited the least. The young gained less than the old; less-educated workers gained less than more-educated workers; single-parent families with children gained less than two-parent families with children; minorities gained less than whites.

At the top of the income distribution, the "haves" benefited much more than others and the ranks of the "rich" grew more rapidly than ever before. Their market incomes increased and their taxes decreased. In contrast, both the market incomes and government benefits of the poor decreased and poverty fell less in the 1980s than in previous economic recoveries.[7] In part, this was because public

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spending on behalf of poor children lagged so that a smaller percentage of needy children are now taken out of poverty by government programs than was the case two decades ago.

As the economic recovery of the 1980s ended and the recession of the early 1990s began, child poverty increased again. By 1991 it had reached about the same rate as in 1965, when President Johnson, observing "the paradox of poverty amidst plenty," saw fit to declare the War on Poverty.

The major lesson of this macroeconomic history is clear—children's economic status on average is not much better today than it was in 1973 and child poverty is as high as it was in the mid-1960s. We now turn to a brief review of the economic, demographic, and public policy trends that have contributed to the poor economic prospects of the current generation of children.

TRENDS IN THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF CHILDREN

Table 1 presents trends in the poverty rate over each decade after 1949 for all children and children living in two-parent and mother-only families, classified by the race/ethnicity of their parents.[8] The poverty rate adjusts both for inflation and differences in family size. For example, in 1990, the poverty line ranged from $9,009 for a single-parent family with one child, to $26,280 for a two-parent family with seven children. The poverty line for a two-parent family with two children was $13,254. The poverty lines are adjusted annually to reflect changes in the consumer price index, so they represent the same level of purchasing power in each year.[9]

Several trends stand out. First, for every group shown, the poverty rate fell rapidly between 1949 and 1969, was roughly constant during the 1970s, and increased during the 1980s. *Figure 1* and *Figure 2* plot annual child poverty rates, available from published Census data since 1959, by race and by living arrangements, respectively.[10] The trends are quite similar for each group—rapid declines until the early 1970s, relative constancy until 1979, a rapid increase through the recessions of the early 1980s, a slight decline during the 1983–1989 recovery, and an increase during the recent recession. Children growing up in the 1990s are as likely to be poor as were those growing up in the 1960s.

Second, poverty rates vary widely by race, ethnicity, and family type. In any year, white children have much lower poverty rates than black and Hispanic children living in the same type of family, and

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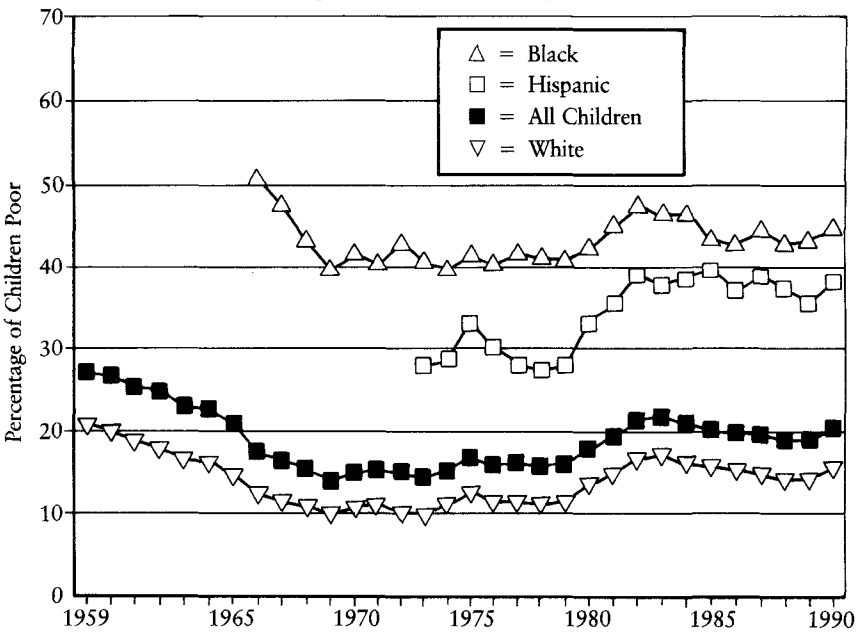
TABLE 1. The Trend in Poverty among Children by Family Type

	1949	1959	1969	1979	1990
All children	47.6%	26.1%	15.6%	17.1%	20.6%
In white, non-Hispanic families	41.2	18.8	10.4	11.7	12.4
Two-parent families	39.3	16.9	7.7	7.8	7.2
Mother-only families	73.1	57.7	44.0	41.3	41.2
In black, non-Hispanic families	87.0	63.3	41.1	36.1	44.4
Two-parent families	85.7	57.9	29.0	19.7	19.4
Mother-only families	93.4	84.4	67.9	61.2	65.0
In Hispanic families	73.0	53.3	33.3	28.3	35.1
Two-parent families	71.6	51.3	28.8	22.5	24.6
Mother-only families	92.4	74.3	64.3	62.0	68.7

Note: For 1949–1979, children 0–14 years of age; for 1990, children 0–18 years of age.

Source: Computations by authors from the computer tapes of the 1950, 1960, 1970, and 1980 Censuses of Population and from the 1991 March Current Population Survey.

Figure 1. Child Poverty Rates



children living in married-couple families have much lower rates than those living in single-mother families.

Table 2 shows the average income, in constant 1989 dollars, for all families with children, grouped into five quintiles and ranked from

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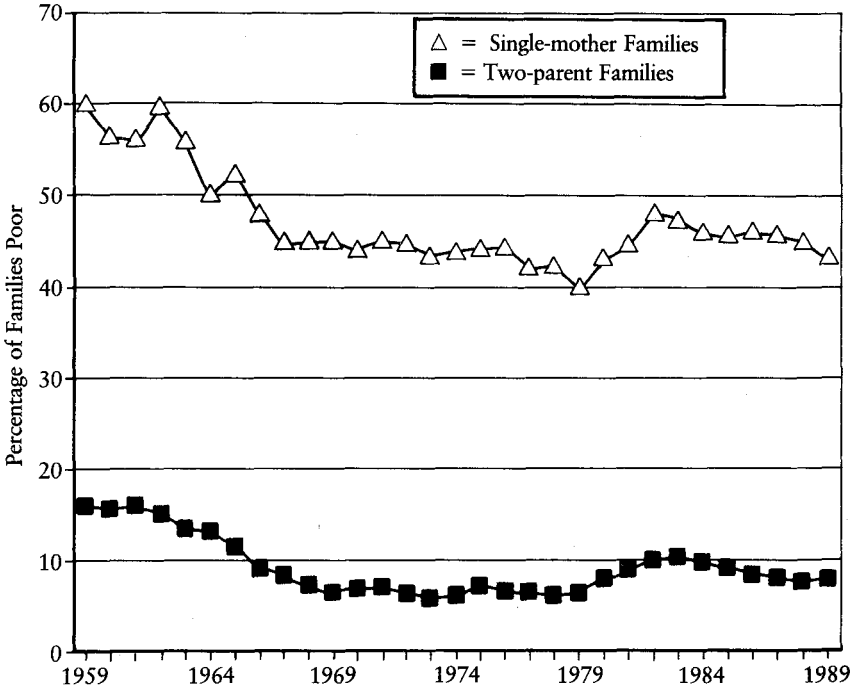
Figure 2. Poverty Rate, Families with Children



the poorest to the richest for 1973, 1979, and 1990. On average, there was little family income growth, as the mean increased over the seventeen years by only 2.4 percent, to $36,890 in 1990. And, the bottom three-fifths of families with children had less income in 1990 than did their counterparts in 1973. The poorest fared the worst. The mean income for the poorest fifth fell by about 30 percent from $10,529 to $7,317. In contrast, the richest families averaged $79,427 in 1990, 12.8 percent more than in 1973.[11] As a result, inequality widened to levels not seen since the late 1940s. The ratio of the mean income of the top fifth of families with children to that of the bottom fifth rose from 6.7 in 1973, to 7.8 in 1979, and 10.9 in 1990.

Slow economic growth and rising income inequality have increased poverty for families with children. The living arrangements of children have shifted which has also caused an increase in the poverty rate. *Table 3* shows the living arrangements of white and black children in 1960 and 1990, and Hispanic children in 1990. Several points are relevant. First, the trends for whites and blacks are quite similar. Children of both races are now more likely to live in mother-only families, especially with never-married mothers. The rate for white children in 1990 is quite similar to what it was for

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TABLE 2. Average Cash Income for Families with Children By Quintiles (1989 Constant Dollars)

	1973	1979	1990	Percent of Change 1973–1989
Poorest Fifth	10,529	9,369	7,317	−30.5
Second	23,176	22,365	19,834	−14.4
Middle Fifth	32,616	33,317	31,916	−2.2
Fourth	43,426	44,940	45,964	+5.8
Richest Fifth	70,420	72,971	79,427	+12.8
All Families	36,034	36,592	36,890	+2.4
Ratio: Incomes of Richest/Poorest	6.7	7.8	10.9	

Source: US House of Representatives, 1992, Table 45, page 1371.

black children in 1960—about one-sixth of all white children live in mother-only families, and less than one-in-thirty live with a never-married mother.

In addition, because of the rapid changes in living arrangements, more than half of black children lived in mother-only families in 1990. The single most rapid change was in the percentage living with never-married mothers. Only about one-in-fifty black children lived with never-married mothers in 1960, as compared to more than one-fourth by 1990. Hispanic children in 1990 were more likely to live with two parents than blacks, but less likely than whites.

For every race/ethnic group, children in two-parent families have much lower poverty rates than children in mother-only families; children living with never-married mothers have much higher poverty rates than those living with ever-married mothers. Gender is now more important than race when it comes to child poverty. As *Table 1* shows, black and Hispanic children in two-parent families have a much lower poverty rate than white children living in mother-only families. Thus, for both white and black children, but particularly for blacks, changes in marital status and living arrangements have been poverty-increasing.

These data, however, do not reflect some poverty-reducing demographic trends that have occurred for single mothers. Today's single mothers have higher educational attainment and fewer children than their counterparts three decades ago, and both of these trends have been poverty-reducing.[12]

Nonetheless, child poverty would remain high even if the living arrangements of children had not shifted as much toward one-parent

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TABLE 3. Living Arrangements of Children, 1960 and 1990

Percentage of Children Living With:	White Children		Black Children		Hispanic Children*
	1960	1990	1960	1990	1990
Two Parents	90.9	79.0	67.0	37.7	66.8
Mother Only	6.1	16.2	19.9	51.2	27.1
Never Married	0.1	3.0	2.1	27.3	8.9
Divorced, Separated or Widowed	6.0	13.2	17.8	23.9	18.2
Father Only	1.0	3.0	2.0	3.5	2.9
Other Relatives	1.4	1.4	9.6	6.5	2.5
Nonrelatives Only	0.5	0.4	1.5	1.0	0.8

*Data not available for 1960.

Source: US Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1990*, Series P-20, No. 450 (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, May 1991).

families, because the poverty rates for children, regardless of their living arrangements, remain high. Even the poverty rate for children living in two-parent families was quite similar in 1990 to what it was in 1969. The only exception is for black children living with both parents. Their poverty rate has fallen substantially since 1969, but it remains at almost 20 percent (see *Table 1*). Thus, the poverty rate for black children has been more adversely affected by the rising incidence of mother-only families than that of other children.

Children now have a higher poverty rate than either nonelderly adults or the elderly. While children have always had a higher rate than nonelderly adults, their disadvantage vis-à-vis the elderly is a recent phenomenon. For example, in 1959 the elderly poverty rate was 35 percent and the child poverty rate was 27 percent. As the economy expanded and social spending increased because of the War on Poverty and Great Society, poverty fell for both groups to about 15 percent in 1973. But, since that time, the elderly rate has fallen further, so that in 1990, at 12.2 percent, it was substantially below the 20.5 percent child poverty rate.

Nonetheless, caution is warranted in analyzing the relative economic status of children and the elderly because poverty rates vary to a greater extent by race/ethnicity and by living arrangements than they do by age. For example, in 1990, the poverty rate for elderly white non-Hispanics who live in households with a male present was 4.5 percent, while that of similar white children was 7.2 percent. But the rate for these white children was much lower than the poverty rate for persons living in households headed by elderly nonmarried

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women—19.9 percent for whites, 44.9 percent for blacks, and 35.4 percent for Hispanics—and much lower than the rates total for minority elderly couples, 24.7 and 14.9 percent for blacks and Hispanics, respectively. At the same time, the poverty rate for white children living in mother-only families, 41.2 percent, was much higher than the rate for minority children living in married-couple families. The highest poverty rates are those for minority children living in mother-only families. At more than 65 percent, their poverty rate exceeds the 1949 poverty rate for all persons![13]

This wide variation in poverty rates can be traced to differences in how these groups fare in the market economy and how they are treated by government income support programs. The well-being of children and nonelderly adults is primarily determined by real wage rates and unemployment rates, while the well-being of the elderly is now primarily affected by inflation-adjusted government benefits that are unaffected by the business cycle. Minorities fare less well than non-Hispanic whites because of their lower wage rates and higher unemployment rates. Mother-only families fare less well than married-couple families because women earn less than men, because these families have fewer adult wage earners, and because their government benefits, which are not adjusted for inflation, have declined in real terms in the last two decades.

At the same time that macroeconomic and demographic changes generated increasing poverty and inequality for children, government cash transfer programs became less effective in reducing poverty. *Figure 3* shows trends in the antipoverty effectiveness of government cash income transfers over the 1967–1990 period. Antipoverty effectiveness is measured by first computing the pretransfer poverty rate—the percentage of the group that would have been poor in the absence of government cash transfers.[14] These government benefits include Social Security, unemployment insurance, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and other cash programs, but not noncash benefits, such as Medicare, Medicaid, and Food Stamps. The antipoverty effectiveness is defined as the percentage of the pretransfer poor who receive enough benefits so that their total money income—from market plus government sources—is no longer below the poverty line.

The primary reason that the poverty rate for the elderly has declined so much is that their social security benefits have increased so much. *Figure 3* shows that cash transfers removed about half of the elderly pretransfer poor from poverty in 1967, and about three-quarters by the early 1970s. This was a period of rising social

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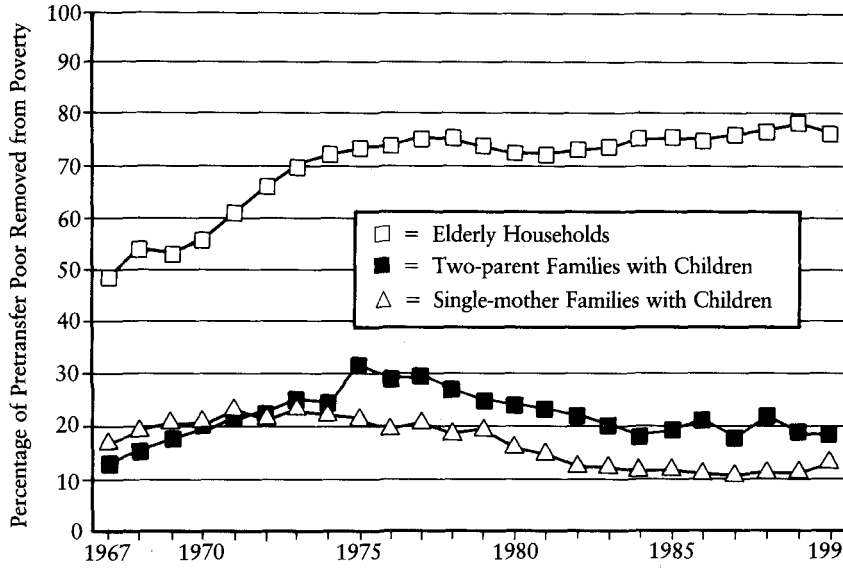
Figure 3. Antipoverty Effects of Cash Transfers:
Percentage Removed from Poverty, 1967–1990



security benefits which culminated in their indexation for inflation by 1974. Since 1973, cash transfers have continued to remove more than three-quarters of the elderly pretransfer poor from poverty.

The trends in the antipoverty effectiveness of cash transfers for persons living in families with children, regardless of the number of parents present, differ markedly. Pretransfer poverty fell for male-headed families between 1967 and 1973 and the antipoverty impact of transfers increased. In the late 1960s, about 10 percent of these persons were removed from poverty by transfers, but this increased to about 30 percent by the mid-1970s. After that time, pretransfer poverty increased and the antipoverty impact of transfers decreased. In 1990, only about 20 percent of the pretransfer poor in married-couple families were taken out of poverty.

In fact, if the mothers in married-couple families had not substantially increased their labor-force participation rates and earned a greater share of their families' income over the past two decades, then the poverty rate for this group would have gone up by an even greater amount. The changing contributions of mothers and fathers can be evaluated using the data presented in *Table 4*. Between 1973 and 1989, the mean earnings of married men with children increased very little and this increase was so unevenly distributed that poverty increased. Row 1 shows that if the only income available to these

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children had been their fathers' earnings, then their poverty rate would have increased by 3.95 percentage points, from 15.79 to 19.74 percent. Their actual rate was much lower and rose only by about 1 percentage point (from 7.24 to 8.17 percent) because of the rising earnings of their mothers.

While fathers' earnings increased only a little, mothers' earnings increased substantially between 1973 and 1989. *Table 4* shows that, *ceteris paribus*, this increase in mothers' earnings would have reduced poverty by 3.08 percentage points.[15] Other sources of income (the net effect of cash transfers and property income) reduced poverty in each year, but changes in these sources had little effect on the trend over this period.

TABLE 4. Sources of Change in the Poverty Rate for Children Living in Married-Couple Families, 1973–1989

	1973	1989
Poverty rate based on:		
Father's earnings	15.79%	19.74%
Plus mother's earnings	11.91	12.78
Plus all cash income sources	7.24	8.17
Change in poverty rate 1973–1989 due to:		
Changing earnings of fathers		+3.95
Changing earnings of mothers		−3.08
Changing other income sources		+0.06
Total		+0.93

Note: Between 1973 and 1989 the average income for children living in these married-couple families increased by 17 percent. The percentage of children living in married-couple families declined from 84 to 75 percent.

Source: Computations by authors from March 1990 and 1974 Current Population Survey computer tapes.

Mother-only families with children have very high poverty rates because they fare worse in the labor market than male-headed families with children and worse in the transfer system than the elderly. For them, as *Figure 3* shows, the antipoverty impact of cash transfers rose more slowly from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, reaching about 20 percent, and then declined. In 1990, cash transfers removed only about 10 percent of the pretransfer poor in this group from poverty.

Poverty for mother-only families with children was higher in 1990 than in 1973 primarily because of the declining antipoverty effectiveness of social welfare transfers. If the antipoverty effectiveness of cash

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transfers in 1990 had been the same as in 1973, then their official rate in 1990 would have been 42.0 percent instead of 48.3 percent.

Despite popular dissatisfaction with welfare programs, cash welfare has never played a very large role in the income support system relative to that played by social security and health expenditures. And, over the past twenty years, welfare benefits for families with children (but not for the elderly) have been eroded by inflation and programmatic restrictions.

Figure 4 shows the rise and fall in inflation-adjusted cash welfare (AFDC) and Food Stamp benefits for a nonworking mother with three children in the typical state (denoted as weighted average) and in three other states.[16] On average, benefits rose from about $8,800 per year in 1960, prior to the time when the Food Stamp program was widely available, to about $11,500 in the mid-1970s, after its rapid expansion. Since that time, however, AFDC benefits have risen much less rapidly than inflation, so the average combined benefit fell to about $9,000 in 1991, well below this family's poverty line of about $13,500. Thus, only in the 1970s and only in some states, such as California and Michigan, were welfare benefits ever high enough to remove a nonworking welfare mother from poverty. In low benefit states, like Texas, a nonworking welfare mother receives less than $7,000 per year, or only about half of the poverty standard.

Government benefits reduce poverty in other Western industrialized countries to a much greater extent. *Table 5* shows child poverty rates in the mid-1980s in the United States and in seven other industrialized countries.[17] Our child poverty rates are, by far, the highest, and the difference between our rate and those of the other countries is largest for children living in single-parent families. Note that in Sweden, for example, only one-in-fifty children in solo-parent families are poor. Our rate for children in one-parent families is still almost 20 percentage points higher than in Canada and Australia, where about one-third of such children are poor.

Our safety net programs just do not provide enough resources to allow children living in single-mother families to escape from poverty. In these other countries, one-half to three-quarters of the pretransfer poor are removed from poverty by social transfers that treat children as generously as they do the elderly.[18]

In addition, poverty has continued to fall in these countries through the 1980s while our rate has risen. A particularly striking contrast is Canada because its economy and average standard of living are so similar to ours. According to Hanratty and Blank,[19] poverty for nonelderly families in Canada in 1970, at 17.0 percent, was well above

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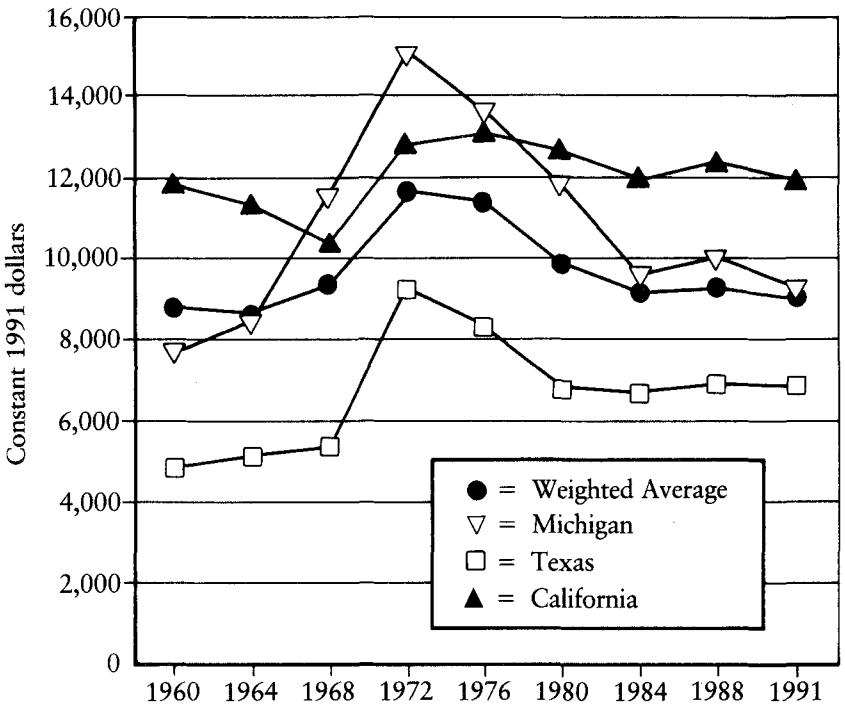
Figure 4. Combined AFDC and Food Stamp Benefits
Family of four with no other income



the US rate of 10.1 percent. But Canada has expanded its safety net since that time and its transfer system is quite successful in alleviating pretransfer poverty, so that by 1986, the Canadian rate, 7.1 percent, was well below the US rate of 11.6 percent.

The Canadian child poverty rate is also now lower, as shown in *Table 5*. In fact, the lowest-income Canadian provinces provide more generous benefits to single-mothers and their children than almost any American state. The average benefit for a welfare mother, as shown in *Figure 4*, is less than 60 percent of Canada's level. In addition, the coverage of the Canadian unemployment insurance (UI) system is much wider. For example, in 1986, 59 percent of the unemployed in Canada received UI compared to only 30 percent in the states. Blank and Hanratty[20] estimate that if the United States adopted the Canadian system, child poverty could be reduced by more than half.

In sum, even if the pace of economic growth accelerates over the next few years, the poverty rate for children in the late 1990s will remain above the 1973 rate. Children have fared badly because their

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TABLE 5. Child Poverty, Selected Industrialized Nations, Mid-1980s*

	All Children	Children in Single-Parent Families	Other Children
United States (1986)	20.4%	54.2%	14.1%
Canada (1987)	9.3	37.1	6.6
Australia (1985)	9.0	34.6	6.6
Sweden (1987)	1.6	2.0	1.5
Germany (1984)	2.8	15.9	2.3
Netherlands (1987)	3.8	3.8	3.8
France (1984)	4.6	13.1	4.0
United Kingdom (1986)	7.4	8.5	7.3

*Note: Poverty is defined as the percentage of children below 40 percent of the median family income after taxes and government transfers for each country. Incomes are adjusted for family size differences using the equivalence scales implicit in the US poverty line in all countries. This 40 percent line is similar to the official US line.

Source: Smeeding, 1992, Table 3.

fathers' real earnings have hardly kept pace with inflation, because an increasing percentage of fathers do not earn enough to support a family, because more children live in mother-only families, and because few receive sufficient government benefits. Although the economic situation of children has deteriorated since 1973, it would now be even worse were it not for several factors that have partially offset these negative economic, demographic, and public policy changes. These include the increased labor-force participation and earnings of their mothers, the increased educational attainment of their parents, and the fact that they have fewer siblings.

POVERTY AND CHILD OUTCOMES: THE CYCLE OF RISK

Having analyzed the extent of child poverty, we now turn to the consequences for children living in poverty and the processes that influence these outcomes. *Figure 5* diagrams this cycle of risk. We note that exogenous changes in the economy and the structure of labor markets and changes in public policies have contributed to rising poverty and economic hardship, as discussed above. Also, changes in social norms regarding marriage, nonmarital sex, and childbearing have independent effects on family structure.[21] In this section, we focus on the direct effects of increased poverty, changes in public policies, and changes in family structure on child outcomes.

All of these changes have generated increased problems for disadvantaged children over the past two decades. The final path shows how these child outcomes, in turn, compromise the well-being of the next generation.

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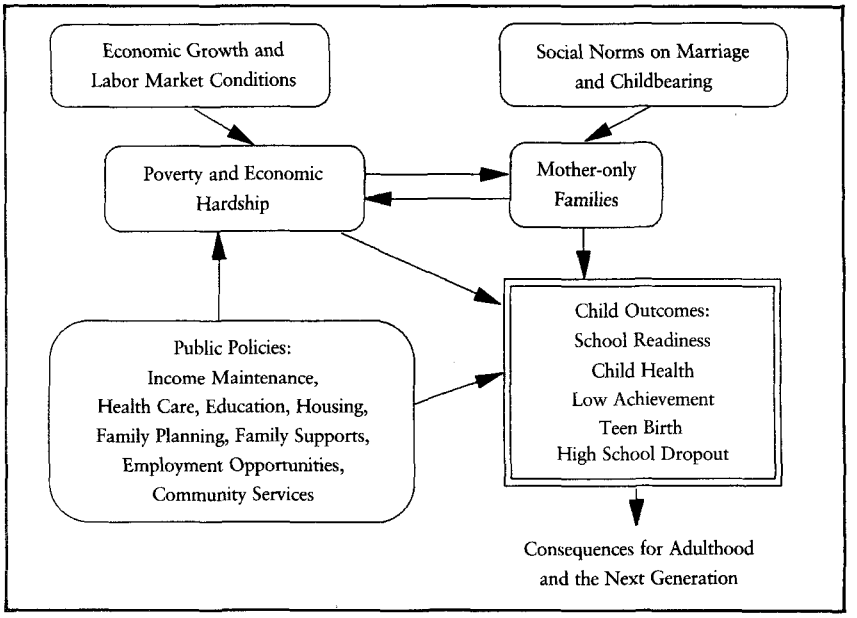
Child problems among the poor tend to be associated with familial as well as economic hardships because these two factors are interrelated. That is, family structure can be both the cause and the consequence of poverty and economic hardship.[22] For example, a nonpoor child, living with both parents, may become poor if his parents separate or divorce, as family breakup typically lowers the living standards of mothers and children.[23] On the other hand, poverty and economic hardships may hasten the breakup of two-parent families[24] or contribute to nonmarital childbearing.[25] In these situations, the child's poverty status may not vary across family structures, but she may incur greater social-psychological hardships if she lives with one instead of two parents. In *Figure 5*, family composition and family income have independent effects on children.

Figure 5. Poverty and Child Outcomes: The Cycle of Risk


Economic Growth and Labor Market Conditions
Social Norms on Marriage and Childbearing
Poverty and Economic Hardship
Mother-only Families
Public Policies: Income Maintenance, Health Care, Education, Housing, Family Planning, Family Supports, Employment Opportunities, Community Services
Child Outcomes: School Readiness Child Health Low Achievement Teen Birth High School Dropout
Consequences for Adulthood and the Next Generation

The problems that occur disproportionately among disadvantaged children have been well-documented.[26] The highlighted box in *Figure 5* denotes those domains in which deficits are more likely among the poor. By many measures of achievement and across several stages of childhood—behavioral and cognitive skills at school entrance, math and reading aptitude scores in elementary and middle schools, high school completion, college entrance—poor children are at greater risk of falling behind. A similar pattern holds for physical and mental health. Economically disadvantaged children are more like to suffer

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from congenital problems, reduced access to medical care, inadequate parental attention, and to live in environments that are hazardous to their safety and development.[27]

Marital disruption or living with a single parent are also associated with childhood problems, including developmental, learning, emotional, and academic difficulties.[28] It is unclear how the various factors of parental absence, marital conflict, economic loss, etc., affect children.[29] For example, the negative effects may arise from the marital strife that precedes a breakup, because the parent who moves out of the child's home is less involved with the child, because the custodial parent has less time and resources to spend with the child, or from some combination of these events. For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to note that children from poor families and from single-mother families are more vulnerable as they develop.

The vulnerability that begins early in life, in turn, affects adolescent outcomes. While growing up in an affluent, two-parent family does not guarantee a child immunity from teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and high school dropout, these problems are much more common among the disadvantaged. A recent survey of prevention programs for adolescents identified these predictors for whether a teenager will get into trouble—poverty, early school problems, living in a disadvantaged neighborhood, having "inattentive" parents, and being a minority.[30]

Finally, problems during adolescence reduce one's economic prospects as an adult. Children who grow up in poverty and fall prey to the problems listed in the box in *Figure 5* are at greater risk of becoming poor adults. Their reduced earnings' capacity, skill level, and employment opportunities undermine their own chances of providing a secure future for their children. The chances of being poor as an adult are over three times greater for children who experience poverty as compared to those who were never poor.[31] Furthermore, those whose early misfortunes are compounded by becoming a high school dropout and/or a teenage parent are not only more likely to become poor adults, but are less likely to marry, more likely to rely on welfare and have children who also drop out of school, become parents as teens, etc., than are youth who both avoid teen parenthood and graduate from high school.[32]

STRESS AND OPPORTUNITY DEFICITS

The processes through which these familial and economic hardships compromise child development are the subject of much recent research. Two general themes run through the literatures—a stress

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hypothesis and an opportunity deficit hypothesis. Stress is conceptualized as operating within families, while opportunity deficits are associated with disadvantaged neighborhoods or communities.

We view these hypotheses as having independent merit, not as competing explanations. Not all poor children are exposed to the same problems; not all are affected by stress or opportunity deficits in the same way. Both processes should be considered by interventions dealing with this cycle of risk. For example, programs that attempt to reduce the stresses within families may be less successful for families that live in very disadvantaged neighborhoods; likewise, programs to improve neighborhood conditions may be less successful if no attention is given to the stresses of families living there.

Many parents who must deal with poverty live in stressful situations characterized by marital strife and/or social isolation (for example, the single mother who lacks the social support of relatives and others) and pass on their distress to their children.[33] Their lack of time, inability to pay attention and address the child's needs, absorption with other family crises, etc., may compromise their children's development. For example, some overburdened or distressed parents develop and practice ineffective and even maladaptive parenting styles. They may be more likely to use physical punishment over verbal reprimands, to attribute inappropriate intentionality to children's behavior, to provide inadequate supervision, nutrition, and preventive health measures. Such parenting problems are also correlated with reported child maltreatment. Child neglect and physical abuse are not exclusively found in low-income families, but they are inversely correlated with income.

Some authors suggest that the cycle of risk can be attenuated through stress-reducing interventions targeted to changing the parent's responses to stress and his/her childrearing behavior.[34] Such interventions range from educational programs that foster parenting skills and child-development knowledge, to psychotherapeutic counseling services to help parents understand the nature of their stress, to legal child-protection proceedings to place children in foster care or up for adoption.[35]

Recently, family-preservation programs which take the stress process as the target of services have been expanded. These programs treat the family as the client and assume that the children's problems are symptoms of the family crisis. They provide a flexible and comprehensive range of interventions to identify family stressors and mediate their impact on family relationships.[36] They seek to reduce stress, avoid child placement outside of the home, and reduce foster-care costs.

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There are widespread reports of short-term successes from these programs. However, longer-term evaluations have not been completed.[37] Recent federal legislation has expanded such family-based approaches. Levels of future funding from Title IV-B child welfare services will depend, in part, on whether a state develops a plan to provide "preplacement prevention" services to families, i.e., services based on the family preservation model.[38]

In addition to the stresses that occur within families, the relative absence of resources and opportunities in the communities and institutional settings in which disadvantaged families reside also negatively effects children. For example, if poor and mother-only families had greater access to high-quality services needed by all families in the health, education, and employment areas, the cycle of risk might be attenuated. The public policies listed in the lower left corner of *Figure 5* are not currently organized to redress inequitable access to and low quality of services. Parents with severe economic stress might not as frequently pass on their distress if their children received better and earlier health care, were placed in quality child-care programs, and had access to school-enrichment and comprehensive employment and training opportunities.

The emerging literature on the urban underclass also suggests that community and institutional deterioration have deleterious effects on families and youth residing in areas of concentrated poverty. In these situations, improvements targeted not only on families but also on underclass neighborhoods, may in and of themselves be both opportunity-enhancing and stress-reducing.[39]

The absence of economic and social opportunities in poor neighborhoods and communities also affects child outcomes. While numerous studies have documented the decline of living conditions in the inner cities and the deteriorating quality of life in impoverished rural areas, the question of how to reverse this process has not been addressed in a comprehensive manner. At the broader level, community-wide initiatives to improve health, control urban blight, improve housing quality, reduce crime, strengthen local public services, such as police protection, job development, etc., may both raise individual well-being and generate a sense of collective accomplishment.

There have been relatively few such initiatives because public involvement has been limited. However, many small-scale or single-site programs designed for specific age groups or neighborhood areas have been fielded. Early evaluations of these demonstrations suggest that comprehensive and well-coordinated interventions can produce positive results.

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One reason that there are so few replications and such little diffusion of these initiatives is due to the piecemeal, categorical, fragmented, and insufficiently funded nature of current government policies. Levitan,[40] for example, estimates that there are well over seventy federal antipoverty programs and that poor families in one urban area would have to apply to eighteen different programs to access all the services for which they qualify. Each discrete program serves only a fraction of those in need and each typically provides a minimal and declining level of assistance or coverage. For example, a recent study of services for homeless and runaway youth identified the failure of public policies.[41] While federal funds serve about one-fifth of those in need, the funds are spent on short-term, crisis-oriented shelters and tend not to deal with the family and community factors that precipitate the problems of these young people.

Policy analysts and service providers have suggested broad-based reforms of programs that offer child welfare services, health care, family support, and community services, and in the educational system from preschool programs through those that deal with the transition from school to work. There are some recent programs that are attempting to deal with both family stresses and opportunity deficits.

Maternal and child-health programs attempt to reduce the risks of infant mortality, low birth weight, and other problems at the start of life that are highly correlated with a mother's poverty status. Successful programs offer a wide range of services, including prenatal health care, nutritional guidance, social support, and counseling, and concrete services from pregnancy through the infancy/early childhood years. Federally-sponsored Title V Maternal and Child-Health Programs, the Women, Infant's, and Children's Program (WIC), and the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) program have reduced the negative health impacts of poverty on young children.

Some Head Start programs and the school-family programs developed by James Comer provide early school enrichment and stimulate community development via parental involvement in the educational system.[42] They reduce stress by helping parent-child relationships and expand opportunities by increasing children's developmental and academic performance and by enriching the school/community programs available to both children and parents. These interventions are most likely to be successful if they extend through the elementary years and continue to promote parental involvement in the schools and communities.

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Comprehensive programs dealing with teenage pregnancy and childbirth address the health, social, educational, economic, and mental health ramifications for the teen mother, the child, the baby's father, the grandparents, and other members of the teen's social support system. For example, the New Chance program attempts to deal with these interrelationships. Young mothers are encouraged to become economically independent from welfare through job-readiness training and vocational counseling. The program also offers life-skills training that deals with family planning, personal relationships, child development, and child health.[43]

School-based teen health clinics that provide preventive health care, health education, and family planning counseling aim to prevent early pregnancy and parenting.[44] Where such services are provided in conjunction with vocational skills, "life options" curricular activities, and peer support programs, the goals of reducing substance abuse, juvenile crime, and school dropout are also addressed.[45]

TOWARD A COMPREHENSIVE ANTIPOVERTY AGENDA

Our analysis of the causes and consequences of poverty suggests that a more comprehensive antipoverty strategy is needed if we are to reduce child poverty and its negative impacts on children. Two lessons that played a role in the launching of the War on Poverty, the last such comprehensive approach, must be emphasized. The first is that economic growth on its own does not reach all of the poor. The second is that well-designed government programs and policies can make a difference and reduce income poverty and some of its consequences. Unfortunately, policymakers in recent years have ignored these lessons.

The programs implemented and expanded during the War on Poverty and Great Society era reshaped our social safety net. As bad as the child poverty situation is, it would be much more severe if there were no Head Start, Food Stamps, Basic Educational Opportunity Grants, Medicare, Medicaid, and Low Income Energy Assistance. Although the coverage of the social safety net was weakened and narrowed in the 1980s, millions of children continue to depend on it.

The legacy of this comprehensive antipoverty effort, however, has been misinterpreted and attacked. The combination of a growing economy and the expansion of social spending in the late 1960s and early 1970s led to our last major reduction in child poverty. The fact that the poverty rate did not fall for the remainder of the 1970s while

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spending was rising, however, led to a major shift in public opinion. Instead of being seen as holding back the negative effects of a stagnant economy, government transfer programs were blamed for the high official poverty rates.[46] This view neglected the major success of antipoverty policy—the rapid decline in poverty for the elderly, on whom most of the additional spending during this period was targeted. Poverty rose primarily for those groups adversely affected by the economy—families with children for whom inflation-adjusted spending increases after 1973 have been quite modest.

Nevertheless, the pessimistic view about the efficacy of government antipoverty efforts influenced the Reagan Administration's reductions in antipoverty spending and conservative rhetoric continues to blame high poverty rates on government spending. The European experience, however, suggests the reverse—child poverty in America is too high because we spend too little on children.

No single program or policy can solve the poverty problem. The multiple factors that contribute to poverty require an integrated set of policy responses. Such a comprehensive antipoverty strategy could cost an additional $30 to $50 billion per year.[47] Although the political problems of undertaking such a large investment in children remain substantial, the specific components of the strategy are familiar. They include: improved education and training, subsidies to working poor families, greater access to subsidized health care and day care, expanded support services for children and their parents, elimination of labor market practices that discriminate against minorities and women, and the provision of employment opportunities for those unable to find jobs.

In addition, a comprehensive strategy would address the full cycle of risk to children and the multiple mechanisms through which poverty diminishes their life chances. The strategy would raise family income, reduce family stress, and improve neighborhoods and communities in the following ways:

- Income support programs would be reformed to reduce the chances and duration of living in poverty.
- Family support services would be expanded to reach more families experiencing the stresses of economic hardship and to buffer the effects of this stress.
- Community and institutional services, for example, housing, local public services, schools, health and day-care centers, youth development programs, jobs, etc., would be provided to expand opportunities in impoverished areas.

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Unfortunately, policymakers have neglected the comprehensive nature of the poverty problem and instead have tended to focus on single issues. Consider the case of income transfer or welfare reforms. Recent welfare-to-work programs in a dozen states have shown that carefully implemented reforms can, with modest additional expenditures, yield reductions in the welfare rolls and increases in employment and earnings. While many of these demonstration projects have been cost-effective, none has produced large welfare reductions.[48] The most successful programs have invested in training and job-placement services in order to empower families to become more independent and productive. Typically, these programs spend more resources in the first years than they save from reduced welfare costs, but they do save modest amounts of government resources in the long run.

To dramatically reduce the welfare rolls, however, will require large amounts of additional funds and a willingness of the federal and/or state governments to serve as an employer-of-last resort. This is because the labor market has two sides—the supply side and the demand side. Welfare recipients and the unemployed control only the supply side, and the government should encourage them to seek out training and work opportunities. Employers control the demand side. The uneven performance of the economy and the demands by employers for highly-skilled, trained workers means that welfare recipients and many of the unemployed—who tend to have less than a high school education or little labor market experience and skills—face difficult labor market prospects even when unemployment rates are low. In addition, current workfare programs do not serve the absent fathers of the children on welfare or the nonwelfare poor, many of whom are also not high in the employers' hiring queue. As a result, the government should subsidize private employers to increase the demand for low-skilled workers or to provide work and training opportunities for them. The government should also provide additional funds for workfare or employment slots.

Besides working with employers, the government can reduce poverty by raising the rewards for taking a low-wage job for all of the poor through nonwelfare programs that subsidize medical care for the uninsured, and expand refundable income tax credits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit. Even if they can find an employer who will hire them, many welfare recipients cannot work enough hours at a high enough wage to earn their way off welfare, given the current labor market conditions. These work-related subsidies are the best way to simultaneously reduce the welfare rolls and child poverty.

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In sum, we need a comprehensive approach for all poor families that will allow both mothers and fathers to take greater responsibility in their roles as parents and workers so that they are better able to provide emotional and financial support to their children. But great gains in these areas cannot be achieved either quickly or with little additional cost in the current economic environment.

The recent period has been a time of economic distress for the middle class, the working poor, and the unemployed as well as for welfare recipients. Because of the extensive economic hardship, the "welfare problem" cannot be viewed in isolation. It is one aspect of a larger "poverty problem," which, in turn, is part of a larger economic problem—slow economic growth, high poverty rates, and rising income inequality.

The only way to dramatically reduce the welfare rolls without increasing public spending would be to simply restrict eligibility and benefits without offsetting the ensuing hardship for the large number of recipients who are not likely to be hired by private employers. In other words, we can save money now but increase child poverty and reduce the productivity of the next generation, or spend money now and reduce child poverty and increase the productivity of the next generation.

In closing, we briefly describe one promising example of a comprehensive strategy. The Child Support Assurance System (CSAS), developed by Irwin Garfinkel, seeks to prevent poverty for all children growing up in a single-parent family.[49] CSAS requires absent parents to contribute a fixed percentage of their income to the custodial parent, with the percentage rising as the number of children increases. The custodial parent would be guaranteed an assured minimum child support payment in cases where the absent parent was jobless, and where the absent parent's expected contribution was low, it would be supplemented by government funds up to the assured level. The combination of this child support and earnings could keep many single mothers out of poverty. CSAS would also reform the current judicial and administrative system for setting child support awards and collecting payments from absent parents. The obligation of the absent parent to support the child and the child's right to a minimum standard of living would be less subject to judicial discretion.

One extension of the program would provide absent fathers with employment opportunities so that they could actually earn enough to contribute to child support payments. The Parents' Fair Share Demonstration Program[50] targets the absent fathers of children on welfare. Taken together, child support reform and employment and

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training for absent fathers, as well as mothers, can prevent some single-parent families from falling into poverty.

Our tattered safety net for families with children contributes to our rising poverty rate, increases stresses within poor families, and diminishes opportunities for their children. The nation can no longer afford to continue a course of limited and fragmented approaches to children in poverty. Rising rates of homelessness, violence, substance abuse, AIDS, and the overwhelming odds of children born to such suffering call for greater public concern and public resources. A comprehensive antipoverty strategy to reduce the causes and consequences of child poverty requires programs targeted at parents as well as children, programs that raise incomes and provide services, programs that reduce the stresses in families and improve neighborhoods and communities. It is not a question of whether we know what to do or how to do it, as much as it is a question of public commitment to tackling these problems.

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ENDNOTES

[1]Francine H. Jacobs and Margery W. Davies, "Rhetoric or Reality? Child and Family Policy in the United States," *Social Policy Report* 5 (4) (1991): 1–25.

[2]Timothy Smeeding, "Why the U.S. Antipoverty System Doesn't Work Very Well," *Challenge* (January/February 1992): 30–35.

[3]The Census Bureau publishes poverty rates using the official measure of poverty for the period since 1959. Eugene Smolensky, Sheldon Danziger, and Peter Gottschalk used the data from the 1950 Census of Population to estimate child poverty in 1949. They took the official lines backward in time using the same price index that the Census uses to bring them forward. See Eugene Smolensky, Sheldon Danziger, and Peter Gottschalk, "The Declining Significance of Age in the United States: Trends in the Well-Being of Children and the Elderly Since 1939," in John Palmer, Timothy Smeeding, and Barbara Torrey, eds., *The Vulnerable* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1988), 29–54.

[4]US Council of Economic Advisers, *Economic Report of the President* (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1967), 16.

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[5]Frank Levy, *Dollars and Dreams: The Changing American Income Distribution* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1987).

[6]The official poverty series does not include the value of in-kind assistance received (such as food stamps, Medicaid, and public housing benefits). If those benefits are added and taxes are subtracted, then the child poverty rate in 1989 was at about the same level as the 1968 official rate. Thus, our characterization of this generation of children as no better off than the previous one is robust with respect to the most common criticisms of the official poverty series. For a detailed discussion of the trend in poverty using a variety of measures, see Sheldon Danziger and Daniel Weinberg, "Market Income, Income Transfers and the Trend in Poverty," conference paper (Madison, Wis.: Institute for Research on Poverty, 1992).

[7]See Sheldon Danziger and Peter Gottschalk, eds., *Uneven Tides: Rising Inequality in America* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992).

[8]The poverty rate for the small percentage of children living in single-parent, male-headed families (about 1 percent of all children in the early years, rising to about 3.5 percent by the latest year) is reflected in the totals, but not shown separately.

[9]Note, however, that the poverty lines are changed only to account for changes in prices, not changes in real incomes. Thus, the poverty line today represents a much smaller percentage of mean family income than it did in previous years. For example, the poverty line for a family of four was about 80 percent of mean family income in 1949, but only about 40 percent of the mean today.

[10]In our work with the public-use computer tapes from the Censuses of Population and from the March Current Population Survey computer tapes, we distinguish between three mutually exclusive race/ethnic groups—white non-Hispanics, black non-Hispanics, and Hispanics. When the Census publishes its data, however, it uses categories that are not mutually exclusive. Thus, in *Figure 1,* the data for whites and blacks include Hispanics as well as non-Hispanics. Because Hispanics have higher poverty rates than white non-Hispanics, our analyses will show larger gaps between white non-Hispanics and Hispanics than those published by the Census Bureau. US Bureau of the Census, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1990,* Series P-20, No. 450 (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1991).

[11]However, even rich families with children gained much less over this period than did the *typical* family in the post-World War II boom, when family incomes increased by more than 40 percent per decade for the rich, the middle class, and the poor alike. Most of the income gains over the past two decades accrued to a small minority of the children.

[12]Peter Gottschalk and Sheldon Danziger, "Family Structure, Family Size and Family Income: Accounting for Changes in the Economic Well-Being of Children," in Danziger and Gottschalk, *Uneven Tides: Rising Inequality in America.*

[13]Christine Ross, Sheldon Danziger, and Eugene Smolensky, "The Level and Trend of Poverty in the United States, 1939–1979," *Demography* 24 (November 1987): 587–600; and Smolensky et al., "The Declining Significance of Age in the United States," examine trends in poverty for various demographic groups from 1939 to

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the present. They report poverty rates for 1949 of about 40 percent for all persons, 49 percent for children, and 60 percent for the elderly.

[14]Pretransfer poverty is defined by subtracting cash transfers (for example, social security, unemployment compensation, welfare, etc.) from total family income. It overstates the amount of poverty generated by the market to the extent that it does not incorporate labor supply reductions due to the transfers.

[15]Note that in 1973, mothers' earnings reduced poverty by 3.88 percentage points, from 15.79 to 11.91 percent. By 1989, they reduced poverty by 6.96 percentage points, from 19.74 to 12.78 percent. The difference between 6.76 and 3.88 is 3.08 percentage points, shown in the lower portion of the table.

[16]US House of Representatives, Committee on Ways and Means, *1992 Green Book* (Washington, D.C.: USGPO, 1992).

[17]The Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) data base contains household surveys from a number of countries that are very similar to the Current Population Survey that provides our data on trends in family income and poverty. *Table 5,* taken from Smeeding, "Why the U.S. Antipoverty System Doesn't Work Very Well," uses the same adjustment in each country for family size differences as are built into the US poverty line. For each country, the poverty line is set at 40 percent of the median income adjusted for family size differences. As a result, the LIS poverty rate for the United States is quite similar to the US official rate and is comparable across the countries shown.

[18]Smeeding, "Why the U.S. Antipoverty System Doesn't Work Very Well."

[19]Maria Hanratty and Rebecca Blank, "Down and Out in North America: Recent Trends in Poverty Rates in the U.S. and Canada," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 107 (1992): 233–54.

[20]Rebecca Blank and Maria Hanratty, "Responding to Need: A Comparison of Social Safety Nets in the United States and Canada," Northwestern University, 1991, Mimeo.

[21]Christopher Jencks, *Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty and the Underclass* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[22]Studies of the causes of marital breakup and nonmarital childbearing find economic hardship as only one of several important factors. See Irwin Garfinkel and Sara McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1986); and David Ellwood and Jonathan Crane, "Family Change Among Black Americans: What Do We Know?," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 4 (4) (1990): 65–84. Changing societal norms have also lessened the prohibitions against divorce, nonmarital sexual activity, and pregnancy outside of marriage. See Jencks, *Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty and the Underclass.* We do not deal with the causes of single-mother families in this paper.

[23]Saul D. Hoffman and Greg J. Duncan, "What Are the Economic Consequences of Divorce?," *Demography* 25 (November 1988): 641–45.

[24]Mary Jo Bane, "Household Composition and Poverty," in Sheldon H. Danziger and Daniel H. Weinberg, eds., *Fighting Poverty: What Works and What Doesn't* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 209–31.

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[25]William J. Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass and Public Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[26]See Sheldon Danziger and Jonathan Stern, "The Causes and Consequences of Child Poverty in the United States," (Florence, Italy: UNICEF International Child Development Centre, 1990); and Aletha C. Huston, ed., *Children in Poverty: Child Development and Public Policy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) for reviews.

[27]Lisbeth B. Schorr, *Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage* (New York: Doubleday, 1988).

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[30]Joy G. Dryfoos, *Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[31]Martha S. Hill, et al., "Motivation and Economic Mobility," (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1985).

[32]For example, Frank Furstenberg, Jr., Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and S. Phillip Morgan, *Adolescent Mothers in Later Life* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[33]Vonnie C. McLoyd, "The Impact of Economic Hardship on Black Families and Children: Psychological Distress, Parenting, and Socioemotional-Development," *Child Development* 16 (1990): 311–46; Patricia Voydanoff, "Economic Distress and Family Relations: A Review of the Eighties," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 52 (November 1990): 1099–115; and Mary Jo Bane, "Security for America's Children," presentation at National Academy of Social Insurance, Washington, D.C., 1992.

[34]Norman Polansky, M. A. Chalmers, E. Buttenweiser, and D. P. Williams, *Damaged Parents: An Anatomy of Child Neglect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Jon Conte, "Service Provision to Enhance Family Functioning," in William Meezan and Brenda McGowan, eds., *Child Welfare: Current Dilemmas, Future Directions* (Itasca, Ill.: Peacock Publishers, 1983), 171–237.

[35]Robert Halpern, "Supportive Services for Families in Poverty: Dilemmas of Reform," *Social Service Review* 65 (3) (September 1991): 343–64.

[36]Jill Kinney, David Haapala, and Charlotte Booth, *Keeping Families Together: The Home Builders Model* (New York: Aldine DeGruyter, 1991).

[37]Harvey Frankel, "Family-centered, Home-based Services in Child Protection: A Review of the Research," *Social Service Review* 62 (1) (March 1988): 137–57; Sheila B. Kamerman and Alfred Kahn, "Social Services for Children, Youth and Families in the United States," *Children and Youth Services Review* 12 (1/2)

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(1990): 1–180; and Michael S. Wald, "Family Preservation: Are We Moving Too Fast?," *Public Welfare* 46 (3) (Summer 1988): 33–38.

[38]US House of Representatives, *1992 Green Book.*

[39]See Christopher Jencks and Paul Peterson, eds., *The Urban Underclass* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1991).

[40]Sar Levitan, *Programs in Aid of the Poor,* 6th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

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[44]Cheryl Hayes, ed., *Risking the Future: Adolescent Sexuality, Pregnancy and Childbearing* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1987).

[45]Dryfoos, *Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention.*

[46]Charles Murray, *Losing Ground* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

[47]See Danziger and Stern, "The Causes and Consequences of Child Poverty in the United States," for an accounting.

[48]Gueron and Pauly, *From Welfare to Work.*

[49]Garfinkel and McLanahan, *Single Mothers and Their Children: A New American Dilemma*; and Irwin Garfinkel, *Assuring Child Support: An Extension of Social Security* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992).

[50]Frank F. Furstenberg, Jr., Kay E. Sherwood, and Mercer Sullivan, "Caring and Paying: What Fathers and Mothers Say About Child Support," (New York: Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, 1992).

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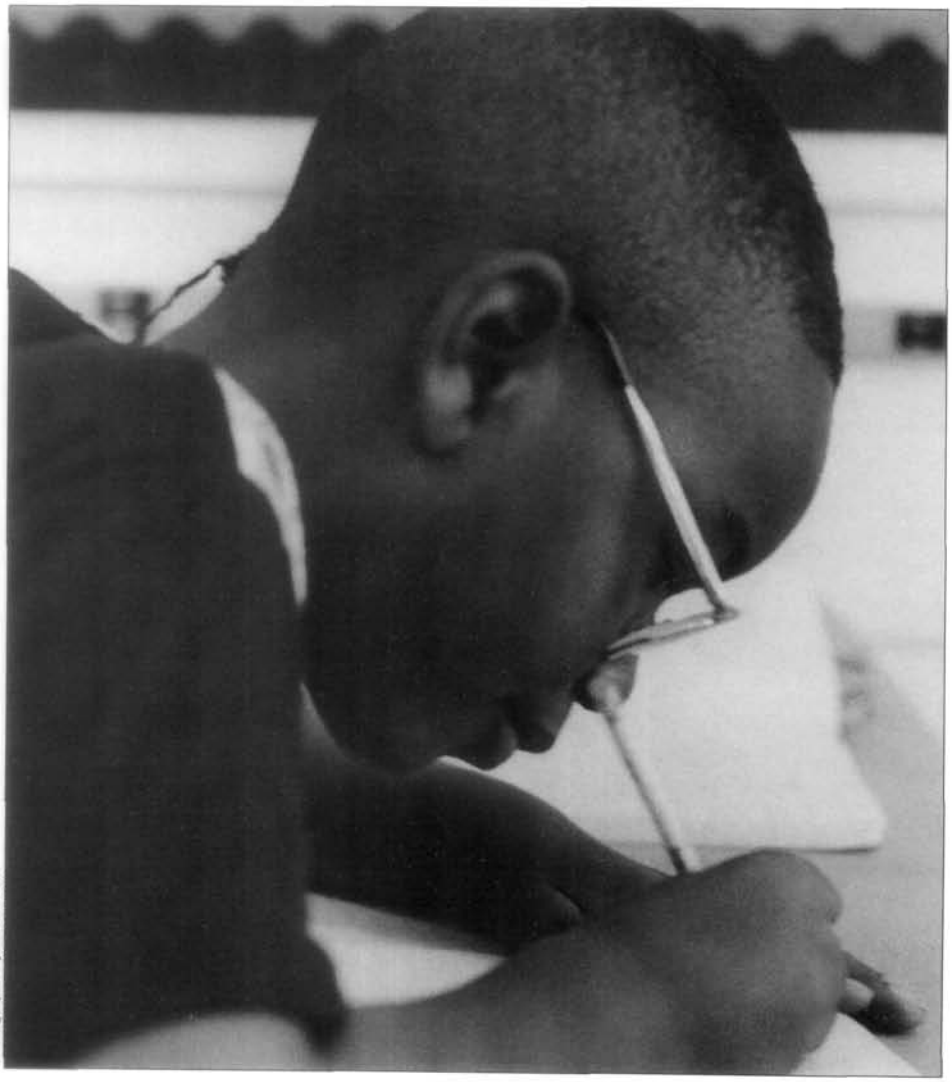

Photographs by David Finn

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me –
The simple News that Nature told–
With tender Majesty.

Emily Dickenson

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The books, just leafed through, whisper endlessly…
John Berryman

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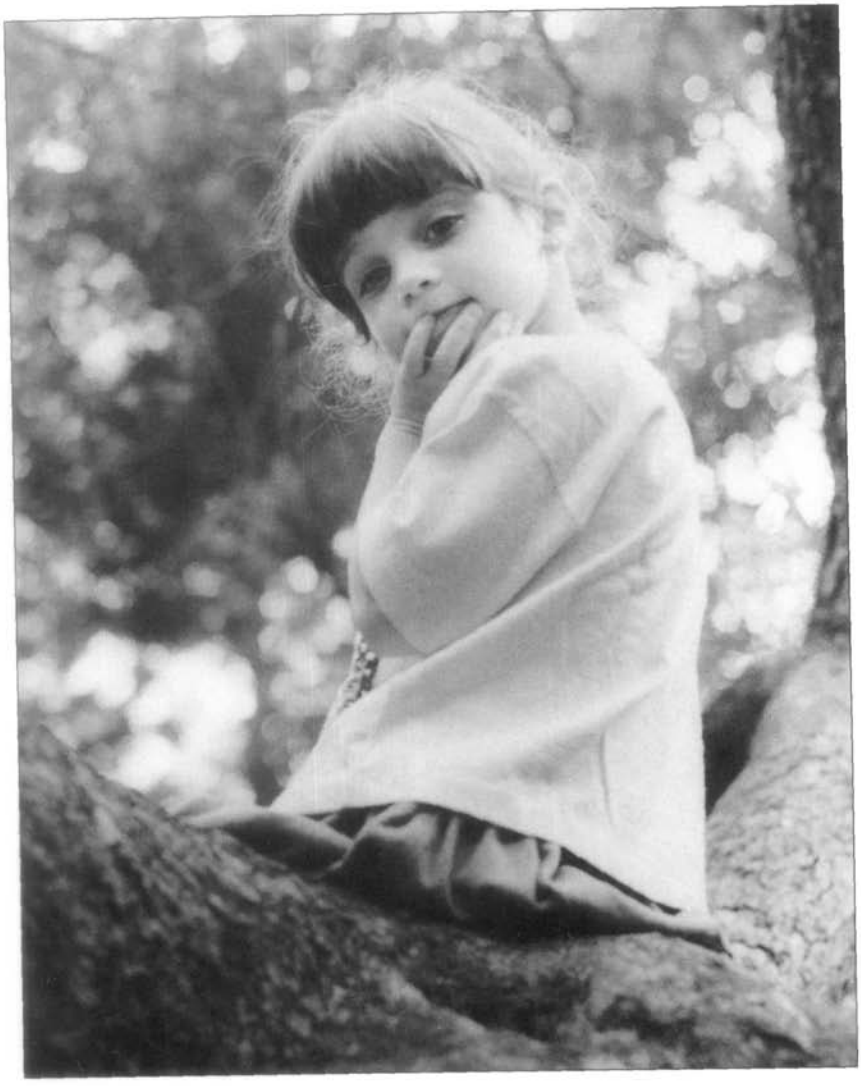

I rejoiced in being what I was...
Theodore Roethke

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What we see, we see
and seeing is changing

Adrienne Rich

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How pure a thing is joy.
Marianne Moore

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Balls will be lost always, little boy…

John Berryman

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Felton Earls and Mary Carlson

Towards Sustainable Development for American Families

Having no idea of how to raise children, and having never watched any parent raise himself, he could not even comprehend what such a relationship should be.[1]

—Toni Morrison

A PROMINENT THEME IN DISCUSSIONS about the welfare of America's children is that the family is changing for the worse.[2] There is a disquieting attitude that this vital social unit has become weakened as an inevitable aspect of modernization. Indeed, some may think that a reversal of trends towards fewer marriages and a higher divorce rate in American society is beyond our capacity. In this essay we submit that the current understanding and response to changing families is superficial and insufficient. A more adequate response would be based on understanding how children acquire in their families the attitudes and skills required to become committed and effective members in the families they construct as adults.

We begin by considering the child-rearing functions of a family because many of the responsibilities of American families, such as education, health care, and entertainment, have been subsumed by other institutions. A debate continues as to whether a remaining and critical responsibility of the family, that of early socialization, can or must be assumed by specialized extrafamilial institutions such as day care and early child development centers. If the influences of contem-

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porary society combine to erode the family as an established and trustworthy unit responsible for raising healthy children, then what remains of this social unit is not an unreasonable question.

From the child's perspective the need for material and social support, whether from a family or another social institution, is unchanging and emerges as a sequence of specified needs based on developing capacities of the child. These needs, and the capacities upon which they rest, emerge without respect to cultural context or historical period. They are as specific as nutritional needs and as necessary for healthy maturation. Our argument is that the quality of this socialization experience determines the capacity of the child turned adult to become a competent family member.

Given an understanding of the vital functions a family serves, its current status in American society is succinctly characterized. To achieve an adequate description of the family's status, it is necessary to understand the broad context in which we live as Americans. Our society is capitalist, democratic, and culturally pluralistic. These influences determine how families live, what values they acquire, and how they transmit these qualities to their children. We aim to provide yet another portrait of the contemporary family, but in this instance one that is attuned to our developmental tenets which emphasize aspects of universal, emerging social needs and capacities of children. The question is how to meet the unvarying needs of children when the family is structurally and functionally changing in a direction less towards nurturance of the young and more towards the individual aspirations of adults as workers and consumers.

In the third section of this essay we address the social policy implications of the requirements we envision for family-society and child-family interactions, reviewing policy recommendations made by others. While these policies represent a step in the right direction, they fall short of the far-sighted and developmentally-oriented approach necessary to encourage the formation and stability of family units in an unstable and changing socioeconomic setting. Both adult-couple formation and child rearing are essential functions of this unit and both imply the capacity for commitment to an adult and to a child.

Finally, we propose a set of guidelines that can support a new and expanded set of policies and we recommend research directions which are necessary to maintain these policies on a rational base of knowledge. In this connection, we borrow the term *sustainability* from environmental ecology because it is the capacity to outlast any

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one generation that characterizes a most basic function of families. We propose to introduce a few recommendations for policy and social science research that can encourage the type of institutional innovation required to reverse current trends and strengthen the fundamental tasks of the family.

A critical point in all that follows is that adequate socialization prepares children to become competent parents for the next generation of children. This preparation cannot begin with sexual education or parental skills training in adolescence, but must begin with the first experiences that children have within their families.

WHAT IS A FAMILY?[3]

It is important to view the family as an outcome of human strategies to satisfy the needs of parents and children for intimacy, security, and nurturance. Strategies which successfully meet these needs have varied throughout history and across cultures. Much of the thinking about the traditional family, as we know it, is that of a work unit. The modern urban/suburban family is less oriented to this division of labor but faces a new demand to prepare children for roles in a technological society. Whatever its economic assignment, a more fundamental requirement is to provide the care, commitment, and context for human development to prosper. In contemporary America, this involves a commitment of time and resources that is probably unparalleled in human history.

Because we focus on a particular period of development, ages three to eleven, it is important to issue two qualifications. This segment of human development deserves magnification, but it is part of a seamless pattern. The first assumption is that the basic needs of the fetus, infant, and toddler will have to be met in order to think about the continuing socialization of the normal child from age three onwards. However, even subtle deprivations in these earliest years can result in not so subtle problems later. The second assumption is that by focussing on this period, we will miss a critically important period in female development. There is much evidence to support the fact that males are vulnerable in the first decade and females are more vulnerable during adolescence.[4] The decision not to consider development during and beyond puberty means that we will not encounter the more mature expression of sexuality that surfaces in adolescence. However, our thesis is that the ultimate foundation of family life is

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built from the earliest and most intimate of social experiences. It is essential to describe these beginnings in some detail. Without such understanding, the risk of seeking simplistic solutions to an issue of such fundamental importance is unacceptably high.

During the period between age three and eleven, children acquire gender and ethnic identification. It is no coincidence that the acquisition of gender orientation precedes the onset of reproductive behavior. Using a similar developmental logic, it may be desirable for children to acquire a secure ethnic identity prior to being exposed to the more overt forms of competition that determine educational and occupational attainment in American society. Stated another way, it is on the basis of the security of one's sexual and ethnic orientation that cooperation and reciprocity first established within a family is extrapolated to relationships and attitudes formed outside the family. While schools, hospitals, and the popular media have become more skilled than the average parent in educating, providing health care for and entertaining children, the family as the medium of this primary socialization remains unchallenged. Our concern is that the demand is a heavy one requiring a devotion and timely interaction with the child that only begins with infancy. Modern society has created conditions in which this demand easily occupies two decades before many children are ready to form and maintain their own families. Having created this demand, we are concerned that our policies, and the knowledge on which they are based, are inadequate.

One of the fundamental ways in which our knowledge is insufficient for the task of protecting the family against the tide of societal change is the popular way in which we conceptualize the family as a functional unit. The picture that dominates political debate and the formulation of family policy is that of a self-sufficient unit that functions independently of the social and political structures in which it is embedded. Even the social sciences that study the family all too readily reflect this insulated view of the family.

The Human Infant as a Social Primate

Our thesis is rooted in the evolutionary heritage of primates as social species. The early development of human infants demonstrates the mechanisms through which the infant *comprehends* and *acquires* the social values of parents and the culture. It is argued that both social and moral understanding, appearing in the first two-to-three years of

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life, depend on cognitive, emotional, and learning capacities, and that through the reciprocal interaction with caretakers, these early perceptions, emotions, and concepts are either maintained or extinguished.

Most primates would be described as gregarious in that they are found to forage, feed, travel, rest, mate, and raise their young in social groups. Although group composition may vary for different activities and by seasons, diverse primate species can be characterized by the structure and complexity of their typical family groupings. The range of complexity varies for particular species from the simple individual female and her offspring unit (typical of the most primative primates) to complex male and female-offspring units which form and dissolve in conjunction with diverse activities (typical of chimpanzees).[5] Interest in the relative importance of the genetic, experiential, and ecological factors in the formation and maintenance of group structure for different primate species is captured by Hans Kummer:

> Each species is more or less confined to one type of habitat, which in turn produces social organizations that vary little within each species. The full genetic potential of such species would only come to the fore if they were experimentally exposed to other environments. The results would not only reveal much more about the evolution of social life than we presently know, but they could also yield some answers on the critical limits of our own social adaptability.[6]

As a beginning to understanding why group bonds form and dissolve, it is common to ask about the motives or incentives, advantages and disadvantages of group versus individual living. In the literature on animal behavior, which is too often imprudently generalized to humans, many theories of social motivation have been developed. In contrast to the popular literature of previous decades which stressed antisocial acts (such as aggression) as major social motives in human behavior,[7] we are concerned with the development of prosocial behavior. While the concept of aggression as a basis of social motivation may have appeal for male-inspired conflicts such as war, it does not appear as fundamental to concepts of pair union and family formation.

In a recent book, *Peacemaking Among Primates*,[8] F. B. M. de Waal describes some important capacities for nonhuman primates to maintain cohesive social groups:

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> Our closest relatives, the primates, form stable social relationships. The members of the group are simultaneously friends and rivals, squabbling over food and mates, yet dependent upon one another and having a strong need for comforting body contact. These animals have to face the fact that sometimes they cannot win a fight without losing a friend. The answer to this dilemma is either to reduce competition or to repair the damage afterward. The first solution is known as tolerance; the second as reconciliation. Nonhuman primates, familiar with both, sustain their communities by a highly developed cooling system that prevents overheating, explosion, or disintegration of the social machinery. They act like human families, many of which manage to cohere for twenty years or more in spite of being a veritable battleground.[9]

Maneuvers, such as gestures, vocalizations, emotions, and food-sharing, serve to terminate escalating social tensions prior to physical contact or bodily injury. The elaboration of complex social behaviors which both permit and encourage stable social groups are more fundamental to this essay than the occasional drama of physical conflict.

The complexity of interactions that emerge from social groupings requires individual animals to attend to and interpret social cues and to anticipate, plan, and execute social responses. Detection, interpretation, and response to the variety of complex and unpredictable social cues in nonhuman primate groups require a combination of perceptual and cognitive abilities. From both an evolutionary and developmental perspective, the extraordinary cognitive capacities of higher primates may emerge through demands for social understanding and serve as a basis for nonsocial forms of intelligence such as literacy and numeracy.

Social Capacities

The propensity of most primate species for elaborate forms of social interaction between adults and the young implies a motivational basis for social behavior. Rather than postulate specific social drives as the basis for social behavior, we consider the emerging capacity to see, hear, interpret, empathize with, anticipate, and modify the social behavior of others as sufficient for initial social interest and activity. Given the critical nature of reciprocal feedback to emitted social behavior in human infants, we contend that initial social sensitivity and responsiveness emerge from a fixed developmental program,

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while the maintenance or amplification of these behaviors in the maturing child requires this reciprocal interaction.[10]

At birth, the infant primate demonstrates several fixed sensorimotor reflexes which are critical to the survival of the newborn. A strong grasp reflex, capable of supporting its own weight for minutes, is present in the hands of human infants for the first months of life. Although human infants are carried or swaddled by the mother, or other caretakers, nonhuman primates are required to cling to the mother (or in some species, the father) without support, as upper limbs are needed for locomotion. The rooting and sucking reflex of all primates is evident and strong at birth, enabling the newborn to search for the nipple and suckle. Beginning in the first weeks of life, human (and nonhuman) infants fixate on the eyes of caretakers and at about the same time begin to show facial expression and vocal responses. Each of these capacities provides some assurance that the need for security and nurturance will be provided by the parent. The infant quickly and efficiently learns to build on these capacities as a way of cementing social bonds with caretakers. It is important to note that these social skills are not reserved for a maternal figure functioning as the sole caretaker.[11] Fathers, siblings, and peers can all become partners in the infant's social orbit in nonhuman as well as human social groups.

An interactionist theory of development, emphasizing the synthesis of biological and environmental factors, has dominated both developmental biology and approaches to human behavioral development in recent years.[12] This approach avoids the nature/nurture dichotomy in order to examine the mechanisms of interaction between these two important factors. Early proponents of this theory stressed how the development of the self-concept in children, along with social understanding, emerged through a process of spontaneous and directed responsiveness of the infant towards other members of the social environment. Interactional theories stress the active role of the infant, along with the importance of contingency, reciprocity, and synchrony between emitted behavior and perceived social consequences. Concepts of the "looking-glass self" and the "generalized other" illustrate hypothetical social constructs believed to originate through interpersonal interaction.[13] Methodological innovations that accompany this conceptual framework stress observational studies of infants in their natural (as contrasted with laboratory) environment under the rubric of "human ecology."[14]

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A recent report, by Judy Dunn, describes the unfolding of social capacities in infants as a function of interaction with their parents and siblings:

> Yet the evidence from the observations shows that children from 18 months on understand how to hurt, comfort, or exacerbate another's pain; they understand the consequences of their hurtful actions for others and something of what is allowed or disapproved behavior in their family world; they anticipate the response of adults to their own and others misdeeds; they differentiate between transgressions of various kinds. They comment and ask about the causes of other's actions and feelings.[15]

In their second year, infants show a sensitivity to goals and intentions of other family members. In their third year, understanding of social rules develops as toddlers demonstrate a sense of responsibility and begin to make excuses for their transgressions. Finally, the appearance of strong self-interest appears in the third year along with a growing interest in others. This period represents an important time to compare self to others and it is then that the enhancement of self-interest in Western children comes to dominate at the expense of interest in others.

The Family and the Child from Three to Eleven

By age three, children have already acquired a remarkable level of social competence. Deviations from the normal in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development can be readily documented by this age. Indeed, the proportion of children who show evidence of significant problems in one or more of these areas is already high enough to develop specific intervention programs with the anticipation that early detection and treatment is more effective.[16]

From this age forward, social competence is elaborated and refined in relation to one's own gender and cultural identity and in relation to one's interaction with others. As the child enters into progressively more complex interpersonal and group encounters with members of the same and opposite sex, and the same and different cultural identities, the level of sensitivity and skill required to function cooperatively increases significantly.

There is near universal evidence for the presence of specialized gender roles in the family. At the simplest of levels, fathers are described as serving instrumental roles while mothers take on expres-

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sive roles.[17] While such role specialization has been described in many societies, it is rapidly approaching an anachronism in American society. Nevertheless, males and females are not the same and it is likely that some distinctions in role functions will be extracted from sex differences for the immediate future. The point is that the understanding and acquisition of whatever level of specialization exists in a particular family forms the basis for the establishment of male-female bonds at subsequent points in the life course.

The acquisition of an ethnic identity is of a similar nature. The family constitutes the context in which an understanding of one's religion, culture, language, and customs is derived. One area in which the acquisition of ethnic identity has been studied is race awareness. From the classic studies of E. L. and R. E. Horowitz and K. B. and M. P. Clark,[18] it was established that black children learned to associate their skin tone with race membership well before they became adolescents. In the Clarks' study, by age three, 36 percent of children identified themselves as black; by age seven this phenomenon was nearly universal. Moreover, children with a dark complexion were more likely to identify themselves as black than children whose skin was of a lighter hue.

The significance of this work has recently been challenged in an expanded critique of studies of ethnic identification among African-Americans.[19] Two conclusions from this treatise should improve our understanding of how children develop both ethnic and gender identity. First, identity for most children is not monolithic. Developing a flexible sense of self in relation to others is an obvious advantage in an open, democratic society. Second, while the older studies indicated that most children had acquired both gender and ethnic identity by school age, more recent investigations show that aspects of these identities continue to be differentiated during adolescence.

For many decades, psychologists have characterized the family along the dimensions of democratic versus authoritarian organization with regard to the general social climate. The prevailing evidence supports a democratic family environment, in which the child's participation in decisions is encouraged and rules are enforced flexibly, as essential to the development of socially competent children. In such families children are described as more outgoing, spontaneous, and creative while children reared in authoritarian family environments are timid, conforming, and less curious. More specifically, there are five characteristics of personality development

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that can be highlighted as outcomes of democratic families and parental warmth: friendliness, loyalty, responsibility, honesty, and moral courage. These are qualities whose desirability few would debate as necessary for good citizenship and as being characteristics that represent the requirements for becoming a good parent.

In addition to the interests of psychologists and sociologists in the socialization of children and maintenance and functioning of families, economists have come to play an ever increasing role in the analysis of family life and the prescriptions for social policy. Interestingly, the basic behavioral premise in modern economics is that of "self-interest." Although fundamental to modern economic models, Amartya Sen questions the validity and usefulness of the sole reliance of economic theory on the assumption of self-interest: "There is, in fact, very little doubt that neither the family as a social unit nor the firm as an economic unit can really operate entirely on the basis of individual self-seeking."[20] In economic models, the family (or household) is treated as a single unit, based on concepts of the *glued-together family,* the *super-trader family* of Gary Becker (viewing families as markets and children as commodities), and the *despotic family*. Sen describes these concepts prior to offering his own model of family structure—that of *cooperative conflict*.[21] This novel proposal for family function has relevance not only for the distribution of commodities within the family, but for allocation of power and capabilities among the parents and children as well. In anticipation of the child's preparedness to become a committed spouse and parent, this important insight makes the development of bargaining and negotiation skills paramount for resolution of conflicting interests within a family (as are tolerance and reconciliation, as previously described for nonhuman primate societies).

The capacity to elicit trust and security from other human beings, to cooperate without regard for immediate personal benefit, to make sacrifices, and to accept enduring responsibilities are necessary skills for becoming a successful spouse and competent parent. The fact that the developmental agenda calls for the acquisition of these skills prior to puberty can be interpreted in two ways. If such qualities are not established "on time" and stabilized, then compensating for them at a later age is constrained. On the other hand, it means that the requirements for becoming a good parent must be established prior to sexual maturity. Indeed, a toddler in our society may have all the special prerequisites to become a good parent.[22] It is incumbent upon parents and society to sustain these perceptual, cognitive, and behav-

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ioral capacities to enable sexually-mature individuals to posses the skills to form and maintain families and support the social competence of their progeny.

STATUS OF THE CHANGING FAMILY IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

Adequate and sustainable socialization requires a supportive family environment in which family members have an enduring commitment to the well-being of the child. In this section we consider the current status of the family in American society. Does this unit of procreation continue to have the capacity to rear children to become conscientious parents themselves?

When we think of a traditional family in the United States today,[23] the image of a unit composed of the working father, nonemployed mother, and children is evoked. This reproductive core, embedded in a more extended kinship structure, was suitably adapted to a range of tasks which probably originated with early agricultural societies. The fact that the two-parent nucleus of the family has persisted through the industrial and technological changes so far achieved in modern society is impressive. But American society is still in a state of flux. A family that promotes social competence, regardless of the exact composition of its adult members, must provide the skills to adapt to changes in the society.

Demographic, Economic, and Cultural Distinctions

Within the American mosaic there are traditions that no doubt still represent stabilizing influences on family functioning. For example, strong religious values and rural life would appear to be conditions that have resisted many of the changes which are consonant with modern society. On the other hand, urbanization, the independence of women, isolation of the family, and the premature fashion in which children are exposed to sex and violence are among some of the influences that appear to in the media have tipped the balance towards the destabilization of the family. One's orientation to the changing family need not begin with accounts of how the traditional unit is being disrupted, but we do need to consider how families adjust or are modified in a changing social and economic context.[24]

One of the most dramatic changes is the proportion of children living in single-parent families. In 1987, the *traditional family* represented only 10 percent of all households (including those without spouses or children) and less than one-third of all families with

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preschool children consisted of the family of a working husband and nonemployed wife.[25] The percentage of employed mothers has consistently risen since the 1950s and the trend towards single-parent (primarily female-headed) households increased rapidly in the decade of 1970–1980. The contribution of divorce to this trend leveled off in the early 1980s while the proportion of never-married women contributing to this picture did not level off until 1987. Those children under eighteen years of age living with two parents decreased from 88 percent in 1960 to 73 percent in 1990.[26] The social implications of these statistics is augmented by the examination of the racial differences among those living in two-parent families. The figures for white children changed from 91 percent to 79 percent over this period while the figures for black children changed from 67 percent to 38 percent.

Those social and economic factors leading to increases in single-parent status also vary as a function of racial/ethnic categories. Of the white children living with a single parent in 1960, 28 percent lived with a divorced parent as compared with 49 percent in 1990. For black children, comparable figures are 12 percent and 20 percent respectively. By contrast, among black children in single-parent families in 1960, 10 percent lived with a never-married parent as compared to 52 percent in 1990. For white children, the percentage living with a never-married parent increased from 2 percent to 19 percent over the same thirty-year period, thus showing an even larger magnitude of change than experienced by black children. We present demographic data because these trends away from two-parent and towards single-parent households (usually to female-headed houses) have important implications for children both in terms of the provision of material needs, as well as in supplying their social, emotional, and cognitive needs.

It should be emphasized that this trend is not unique to the United States. In Sweden and Denmark, a similar proportion of about 25 percent of children lived in single-parent families in the 1980s. It would be interesting to know how similar the constellation of factors contributing to these trends in Scandinavian countries relate to those operating in black American families, because in both groups approximately half the single-parent households were composed of never-married mothers. This is in marked contrast to Finland, Britain, Germany, and France, where about half the single-parent households are headed by divorced women, as is the case for white American families.[27]

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Importantly, European children in single-parent families are protected from the combined threat of economic and time poverty through the provision of social programs and high quality child-care facilities.[28] Such services are not so readily available to vulnerable children in the United States. All poor children qualify for the generous social insurance benefits in European countries whereas in the United States, programs vary in uniformity and eligibility leaving many poor children without benefits. Analysis of the basis for the variation in European and US policy towards family and children touches upon major social, economic, and historical differences between these nations. Programs in most European countries include a guaranteed minimum child-support payment for single-parent households as well as income supplements to poor working one- or two-parent families. Over the same period that European countries have developed comprehensive health and income support programs for families, the United States has failed to enact any major innovations, partly because of the role race plays in the family issue. Beyond race, however, it is unfortunate that neither political party has a major commitment to children. Policies in the United States have been directed selectively at poor people, whereas in Europe the approach has been far more universal. These policies reflect an intrinsic value placed on children and families, policies which were spared from the ideological and political conflicts seen in US social policy.

Life Course Transitions

One way to understand the direction and intensity of change in the contemporary American family is to examine the developmental stages that lead up to its formation. These stages are represented by role transitions that typically occur during adolescence and young adulthood. In considering them, it is essential to keep in mind our premise that the values and attitudes that guide these transitions are established prior to adolescence.

John Modell provides a historical analysis of how rules that shape the life course in American society have contributed to changes in sex roles and family structure.[29] This is accomplished by considering three transitions in the life course: the transition from the onset of coital activity to marriage, that from marriage to parenthood, and the transition from marriage to divorce. In each case the timing of these transitions is analyzed with respect to how they may have contrib-

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uted to a change in rules governing societal expectations. The most pronounced of these changes is the first. The onset of coital activity has become earlier and the age of first marriage later in American society. To cope with this longer period of waiting to form a family, dating and premarital cohabitation have become new cultural prescriptions for adolescents and young adults. A more leisurely schedule of marriage has been adopted in which decisions are more independently made than in the past and the particular choices that young people make have become more innovative.

While divorce rates increased markedly during the period from 1920 to 1975, the number of years it took to produce a divorce appear to have changed little. What disappeared was the inhibiting effect that the presence of children had on the decision to end a marriage.[30] When this is combined with an increase in the number of children in never-married families, the trends currently depicted in family structure are better understood as part of a historical process which is probably not reversible. It is important to keep in mind that these changing life course rules affect black families much less than they do white families. In general, the earlier onset of coital activity, the innovation in family structure, and higher divorce rates without the inhibiting influence of the presence of children have characterized black families over a longer period of time than white families.

Given this historical picture, we turn to a consideration of a set of correlated social phenomena that require explication to more fully characterize the contemporary American family unit. They are the changing work roles of men and women, the isolation of the family, and a growing wariness about the overstimulation of children.

Changing Work Roles, Women's Independence, and the Diminishing Status of the Father

Women's greater social and sexual independence in contemporary society has brought with it greater participation in the labor force and increased wage earnings. This autonomy has been greatly enhanced by the availability of technologies that provide control over the decision to have children and the timing of conception. Women's labor-force participation has resulted in their greater economic role in the family and consequently a better bargaining position in the family. In Europe, but not in the United States and Japan, this new economic and social status has led to greater political involvement. In Nordic countries, there are approximately fifty women for each one

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hundred men in Parliament, as compared to the United States and Japan where there are only six and one respectively for each one hundred male national politicians. Not surprisingly, those countries that have the strongest policies for family support and gender equity are those in which women have achieved the greatest political participation.[31]

The impact of this century-long political struggle for the independence of women has both economic and psychological implications for men and children. While the earning power of women has been increasing, the earning power of men has been decreasing. As a compensatory move for decreasing earnings, men work longer hours. The combined toll of more women working and men working longer hours is to create a family environment in which both parents have less time for children. This "time poverty" creates its own effects.[32] Parents are more stressed because in order to maintain their income level they have less leisure time for themselves and for their children. One estimate is that the amount of time parents have to spend with their children has decreased about 40 percent since World War II. Between 1960 and 1986, the potential time with parents for white children dropped by 10 hours a week and by 12 hours for black children due to increases in mother's employment, in father's working hours, and in the incidence of single-parent households.[33]

We must admit to knowing less about the psychological impact of women's independence on fathers and children. One desirable effect is for fathers to adapt to this reality by spending more time with children as a way of offsetting the decreased time available from mothers. It is quite clear that fathers have the capacity to appropriately substitute for what has traditionally been defined as "maternal" care.[34] But if working more hours is perceived as essential for economic survival, greater father participation will be undermined. Furthermore, social change for women has led to a change in paternal commitment for a sizeable number of noncustodial fathers who spend neither time nor income on their children after leaving the household.[35]

The consequences of mothers' labor-force participation on children have been examined over the last fifty years since mothers have entered the work force in significant numbers. Whereas it has always been assumed that father's employment is beneficial (in fact, necessary) for family function, maternal employment is viewed as posing a risk for children and marriages. Three to four decades of research have led to several consistent, but complex, conclusions. Although

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earlier studies were designed to examine the deleterious effects on children, later studies demonstrated the need to weigh a host of mediating factors. Among the most significant of these factors are the nature of the mother's work and the sex of the child. Not surprisingly, the level of satisfaction the mother finds in her work is reflected in the implications of her employment for her children's well-being. In addition, full-time maternal employment appears to have consistent positive effects upon daughters, whereas similar work is associated with lowered intellectual performance in boys. It is also important to consider social class and family structure (single- versus two-parent) in interpreting the benefits or risks of maternal (or paternal) employment for children of different ages and genders. The general assumption that children of poor, less educated mothers do better in day care (in contrast to the preference that middle-class women with young children remain at home) is a reflection of assumed maternal competence rather than an empirical statement of the different class-determined maternal capacities to promote intellectual and social development.[36] A summary of research findings would suggest that it is less detrimental for middle-class mothers of daughters, than lower-class mothers of young sons, to choose (or be required to seek) full-time employment.

When influences which are reflected by labor-force participation are put in the context of the changing composition of and roles within the family, the economic incentives for delayed childbearing, more widely spaced pregnancies, and smaller families are easily comprehended. But, from a psychological perspective, the role diffusion that accompanies the new division of labor within the family (from child care to wage earning) produces pressures to change role assignments. Women assume a more active posture in this regard since they are gaining independence, while men must adopt a more passive and reactionary posture in which they view their once exclusive and powerful roles as breadwinner being eroded. How to calculate the contribution of this psychological factor in men's proclivities towards the formation and stability of a family is one of the unmet challenges of contemporary social science.

Isolation of the Family

Mobility is a cultural trademark for American success. It has reshaped our society several times over the past two centuries. The westward expansion culminated in California becoming our most

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populous state. Through continual waves of immigration it has also become the most culturally diverse state. The migration of southern blacks has fundamentally changed the character of northern cities. Much of the wealth, accumulated in upper and middle income majority groups in the industrial cities of the Northeast and Midwest, has been shifted to suburban areas and to other regions of the country.

The sum of these geographic and demographic changes has been to produce a society in which many families are more isolated from one another and from their extended family heritage than ever before. This does not apply evenly to all ethnic groups; indeed, it appears that certain groups have succeeded in preserving neighborhoods in some cities. Nonetheless, among families who do move, those with the financial means are able to compensate for the loss of neighborhood and extended family by purchasing the lost resources as commodities (i.e., day care, private education, self-controlled entertainment devices). Families in poverty find themselves caught in a fragmenting social process that breeds despair, hopelessness, poor health, undereducation, and violence. These urban areas have been largely abandoned by those who have the resources to move out. Society's general disregard for those (mostly black and Hispanic) who are locked in urban poverty, dovetails with a fear of urban violence to further enforce a degree of isolation. This type of isolation is obviously much more debilitating than the type based on the mobility that characterizes the more affluent groups. What they have in common is a quality that jeopardizes children by distancing them from committed adults other than their parents and from the human resources these individuals bring to any encounter with a child.

Wariness About the Overstimulation of Children

Over much of this century an extraordinary change has occurred in the rate of physical development of children. Reflected by the earlier onset of puberty and increasing physical stature, it is assumed that improved nutrition and health care are responsible. While these are desirable changes, it can hardly be claimed that they were intended. During the same decades when the rate of physical development was accelerating, the age at which youth became economically independent increased.

In a more subjective area, apprehension revolves around ways in which the social and emotional development of children may be

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unintentionally accelerated. The major concerns rest in the effects of day care and exposure to images of sex and violence in the media and on film. In both cases, the sense is that we may be overstimulating children in ways that encourage emotions and activities for which they have neither the experience nor the concepts with which to cope.

The need for early child care is an inevitable consequence of mothers joining the labor force in increasing numbers and the relative isolation of the family. The current debate about such care is focused on the emotional consequences on infants, since the impact of early out-of-home care on children over the age of three is thought to be more beneficial than harmful.[37] As far as its effect on social competence of children is concerned, it appears that good quality infant day care is likely to enhance and not disrupt healthy emotional development.[38] This should translate into a greater sense of autonomy and independence in children. The problem, however, is agreeing on what constitutes a minimal standard of care. It is this factor that contributes, positively or negatively, to the quality of family life. Being more adept at solving problems on their own and with peers means that their need for adults is diminished, although by no means is it substituted by such early emerging social skills. It does require parents to adjust their expectations and disciplinary strategies towards children in ways that their own upbringing may not have prepared them. The combination of time pressure, greater fragility of marriages, and the growing autonomy of children produces an uncomfortable picture of the modern American family.

The explicit depiction of sexual intimacy and violent encounters on television and in film raise another cause for concern. By exposing children to information they may be poorly equipped to understand and interpret, inappropriate and precarious behaviors may result. A resolution of this concern will eventually be determined by a better understanding of how much learning actually takes place through such vicarious exposure. In the meantime, limiting children's access to sexually explicit and violent scenes in the media represents just another demand on the already compromised time parents have to monitor and supervise their children. Yet, the potential consequences of uncontrolled access and lack of supervision are disturbing. The average number of hours children spend watching television increases with age, peaking at around 4 hours a day at age twelve.[39] Among the more important implications of this finding is that viewing time continues to increase despite the fact that schooling occupies a significant part of the child's day. This means that a greater portion

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of the viewing time is shifted to evening hours with an increase in the probability of exposure to images and messages intended for adults. Imitation of sexually explicit scenes may produce inappropriate orientations towards sexuality. Inculcation of vicariously experienced violent encounters may produce cruel and dangerous orientations towards the self and others. Overreliance on television (and its VCR companion) as a baby-sitter may inadvertently produce a syndrome of pseudomaturity. Some psychologists have raised the question of whether exposure to explicit scenes of sexual violence may not constitute a form of "imprinting" in children under the age of twelve.[40]

Again we must qualify these concerns by sounding a cautionary note that generalizations across ethnic and class groups are not warranted. In the section that follows on governmental policy, the variation that constitutes our multicultural society will be most important to consider.

CURRENT FAMILY POLICIES

Two recent publications, the report of the National Commission on Children[41] convened by the President and Congress, and a more popular work, by economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett,[42] suggest a collection of similar policies to support families and children which are consistent with the theme of this essay. The Commission states that parents, both mothers and fathers, bear the primary responsibility for promoting child development and healthy family functioning. Both the Commission and Hewlett refer to the importance of maternal and prenatal health care as well as health care leading up to the child's entry into school. The Commission indicates the cost-effectiveness of prevention strategies with children and suggests the importance of instilling moral values as part of the "national heritage."[43] A second area in which the Commission makes recommendations is in the relationship between the family and community, in which they stress the importance of communities as safe, secure environments, of community-based family support programs, and of the community in forming and supporting strong, stable families. Hewlett also mentions the importance of housing subsidies in assuring the stability of families.

A third area of interest mentioned by both are those employment policies and practices, such as parental and medical leave, flexible

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work scheduling, and career sequencing, which promote bonding of the child with the parent and shared work and child-care responsibilities between parents. Policies that allow for more time for parents with children address the issue of time poverty or time famine, which limit the opportunity for social interaction between all family members.

Both publications mention the importance of high-quality child care to provide for the child during parents' working hours and an opportunity for enrichment of children's experience. The Commission also mentioned the importance of promoting the availability, affordability, and quality of child-care facilities. These three elements were the basis for recent child-care legislation, the Act for Better Child Care Services. Unfortunately, the quality standards were eliminated from the final bill, which in the original form specified minimum standards for staff-ratio, group size, and staff qualification and training. These elements are among those found to be most important for both normal cognitive and emotional development in children in child-care settings.[44] Staff-child ratio and group size have important implications for the amount of time that the adult staff are able to interact in a reciprocal manner with individual children, an important element of the early socialization process which cannot be based solely upon child-child interaction.

TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR AMERICAN FAMILIES

There are two cardinal principles that the above policy recommendations fail to address. Their absence weakens the potential to insure that our society will use its resources most wisely to assist families to adapt to changes that are part of modern life. Throughout this essay, we have emphasized a developmental perspective in which becoming a conscientious parent is contingent upon developing a sufficient level of social competence by age eleven. This requires a quality of social experience with at least one, but preferably two adults to provide the child with the rudiments of social experience necessary to guarantee the dedication and skill necessary for them to become an effective parent in maturity. We emphasize that reciprocal interaction is the key to building that motivation and competence. Our social heritage insures that the infant is prepared to participate in this interchange as an active participant.

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Society will have gone a long way towards creating a set of policies most likely to support the family during turbulent times if it is uncompromising in securing this level of welfare for all children. The uncontroversial documentation of the increase in the time both parents spend in wage labor, in most cases to procure the basic, minimum material requirements for their family, must be evaluated in light of the trade-off of reduced time spent interacting with children. Poor children suffer from parents working longer hours for low wages, or without steady employment, from lack of child-support payments from noncustodial parents, and from income transfers that fail to bring them out of poverty. They are apt to suffer the consequences of both resource and time poverty. Current schemes, requiring work from single parents to receive Aid For Dependent Children (AFDC) payments, must consider the short- and long-term consequences for the child of reducing parental time. Middle-class children may avoid resource poverty but experience time poverty due to the relative value attached to material acquisitions versus parental interaction. This society's glorification of the material, over the social, encourages parents to substitute time and attentiveness towards their young children with acquisition of family possessions. We assert that the child's well-being and competence must be given primary attention because material goods, but not behavioral capacities, can be more easily acquired later in life. Parents and policymakers must consider the potential cognitive and social sequelae in the trade-off between time and income for different family types in all social and economic classes.

The second principle unites policy-making and the science of child development into a common discipline. A model for this type of integration exists in many human endeavors where practice requires an understanding and acceptance of scientific methods, such as in medicine and public health. There are areas in which policies to support families are based on firm knowledge. A good example is the understanding we now have of the effects of maternal employment on child development.[45] This once hotly debated subject has now been put to rest by numerous well-done studies that show certain benefits for children who have a gainfully employed mother when the children are provided with quality day care. But there is much that we still do not know. The best way to insure that this knowledge will be put to best use is to integrate policy and science. This would mean that individuals responsible for policy determination are also trained in child development and that researchers in child development

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understand the importance of research to the process by which policies are made and sustained.

With these principles in mind we emphasize some specific areas in which we believe that additional work is needed. These do not replace many of the valuable recommendations made by the National Commission on Children and others but are meant to extend such advice into more controversial and uncharted areas.

Our first proposition rests on a supposition that men have a range of responsivity and investment in child rearing (beginning with infants) which is equal to that of women. Thus once a mother gives birth and provides breast-feeding to an infant, no further distinctions between mothers and fathers should be made in caring for the child. Governments, businesses, industries, universities, and schools should adopt policies that encourage such equal participation. Research is needed to check the validity and the limitations of this assumption. One area in which no research is needed is in the provision of time away from work. Liberal policies for parental leave should be available to mothers and fathers and all families should have six weeks of paid vacation a year. This may be the only effective means of combating the effects of time poverty.

A second proposition states that children need exposure to both males and females at all ages in order to learn how to build tolerance and resolve conflict in cooperative situations. Men and women should be employed as day-care providers and teachers in preschool and elementary schools. Part of the curriculum in these settings should be exposing children to men and women working as cooperative units in which they negotiate differences and solve conflictual situations with each other as well as with children. This type of exposure is particularly important for children in single-parent families and for children whose parents are in chronic turmoil or who are in the process of separating or getting divorced. Carefully planned research studies are needed to evaluate if the effects of such interventions are beneficial over the short-term and if so, whether or not such benefits hold up over the long-term. To motivate men to enter these occupations in greater numbers, wages and the prestige of these jobs need to be increased. Fortunately these are benefits that women in these jobs and children will also profit from.

The third proposition recognizes that socialization is a process that begins at birth and has a major impact on development in the first three years of life. This process extends well beyond this period, but early deficits may only be compensated for, not reversed. To achieve

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a level of competence required to consistently and effectively resolve conflict within the context of a collaborative relationship, experience in a harmonious family environment is required. More research is needed to thoroughly test this proposition in contemporary families. Child advocates (perhaps court appointed) need to educate parents to shield children from marital disharmony as much as possible, and to encourage parents not to separate for "the sake of the child." Marital counseling and divorce mediation are extremely important skills that need wider recognition among lawyers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and judges and greater public exposure. Current policy in family law may place too much emphasis on securing the personal material interests of parents and insufficient attention on the social needs of the child.

The forces that are promoting the acceleration of child maturation must be better understood and appropriately controlled. This fourth proposition refers specifically to extrafamilial socializing influences such as the media, the quality of day care, and educational standards. Here we are concerned with the special nature of children who are being reared in a complex world in which the sense of control possessed by adults is frequently challenged. The media all too easily exposes children to exploitation, deceit, and violence in male-female relationships and to the dissolution of such relationships in response to such confusion and harshness. Given the prolonged maturation now required for occupational success, the dependency needs of children are greater than ever. Fostering maturity acts contrary to the aim of lengthening childhood. The child in the single-parent family may again be the more vulnerable to such exposures in terms of acquiring a sensitive understanding towards male-female alliances.

Like most things in nature, the well-being of families is not randomly distributed. Half the American families (those without college educated parents) have experienced a deterioration in their standard of living over the past decade while the other half have experienced economic improvement, resulting in a widening gap between classes. Any program that seeks social justice must address the particular needs of these disadvantaged families first. To accomplish this, our fifth proposition is that a national commitment must be made to optimally support the well-being of American children at every level of the income strata. Other industrialized countries with economies and demographics similar (but social values and political will more supportive of children and families) to those in the United States have established such egalitarian policies for their children.

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Our sixth proposition holds that an international perspective would be beneficial in helping the American government continue to make advances in family policy. First of all, as we have argued, it is a universal characteristic of all families to sustain themselves and to have the flexibility required to confront unanticipated changes. American families are not the only ones experiencing such change. Indeed this is a demographic and social reality in much of the world. It would be instructive to have global meetings on the status of the world's families and to establish international groups to monitor family policy and research centers to conduct policy analysis.

Our last proposition acknowledges that the family is dependent on other institutions for its endurance. As a society we are in need of a proclamation that states "no family is an island." The school, church, businesses, parks, recreational facilities, and transportation links that constitute the components of a community are all essential supports of a family unit. Children need to have a sense of belonging to a neighborhood. In the period between age three and eleven they are moving beyond the boundaries of a family or household unit and beginning to explore and experience their local environments. But many American parents now live in areas where their sense of security has been overcome by a fear of crime and violence. Perhaps even more insidious in the long run is an attitude of disregard about communities as social structures. There is too little interest, or too great a lack of understanding, about how the quality of community social life influences our health and well-being. Even in academic circles the scientific study of social structures is on a sharp decline. What we propose is an invigoration of policies that support the development and maintenance of communities as organized social units. They represent the next higher level of social organization up from the family. Children's development is intimately bound up with the space and resources immediately outside the family. The family cannot be considered in isolation from the social environment of neighborhoods and larger communities, and it is time we devote considerable intellectual energy to its proper study.

A more balanced and integrated research agenda is needed in which child and family welfare is examined with a longitudinal perspective that incorporates those concepts and findings from fields spanning the biological and social sciences. The important contribution of the study of early childhood is to provide insight into the processes by which adult motivation and competence is shaped through social interaction early in life. The study of social structures

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in which families live is critical to understanding the formation and stability of families and their ability to promote their children's development. The crucial trade-off between time and resources in the competing roles of adults as spouse, parent, and employee can be best addressed by economists, whose discipline is geared to analyze such exchanges and to conceptualize issues across the life cycle. Our capacity to deal with the urgent situation that families and children face in our society today will depend upon the successful exchange of concepts and findings between these disciplines. In all cases, the outcome measures of research, and policy, must be the well-being and competence of children and families, with a view towards the long-term potential for social sustainability.

CONCLUSION

There is a need for an intellectual and moral climate in American society that embodies a commitment to protect and foster children. The presence of such a climate would serve as a stimulus and reminder to all families of the conscientiousness and dedication that characterizes the typical relationship of a parent to a child. Given the absence of such a climate, we should be alarmed over the current trends in American family life. The increase in single-parent female-headed households and the progressive marginalization of men might well continue unabated into the next century.

In this essay we have provided a framework to demonstrate how the family, and other social units acting in concert with it, can provide the guidance and encouragement to children to maintain the social sensitivity and to acquire the skills necessary to sustain a family. A general understanding of cooperative strategies, of conflict resolution, and shared decision-making is a requirement for the formation and maintenance of the family unit. These skills not only serve the purpose of building a family, but in creating the social structures on which the family depends. While the full impact of the recommendations we make will take no less than a generation to achieve, there is an acute need to put in place immediately family-sensitive policies that will offset material and time poverty and encourage parents to create stable environments for their children.

We hazard an axiom that characterizes the theme of this essay: that the major social responsibility of parents (and other caretakers) is to maintain and embellish the early social concern and understand-

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ing of young children to enable them to form long-lasting relations with their own partners and children.

ENDNOTES

[1]Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye* (New York: Pocket Books, 1970), 226.

[2]George Gallop found that over half those polled believed that the family had worsened between 1965 and 1980. Only 7 percent thought that family life was improving.

[3]The US Census Bureau defines a family as a group of two or more persons residing together who are related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

[4]Felton Earls, "Sex Differences in the Origins and Development of Psychiatric Disorders," *Psychiatric Developments* 5 (1987): 1–23.

[5]J. G. Fleagle, *Primate Adaptation and Evolution* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1988); J. F. Eisenberg, N. A. Muckenhirn, and R. Rudran, "The Relation Between Ecology and Social Structure in Primates," in R. W. Sussman, ed., *Primate Ecology: Problem-Oriented Field Studies* (New York: John Wiley, 1979), 455–84.

[6]Hans Kummer, "Dimensions of a Comparative Biology of Social Groups," in *Primate Ecology: Problem-Oriented Field Studies,* 388.

[7]Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (San Diego: Harvest/HBJ, 1963).

[8]F. B. M. de Waal, *Peacemaking Among Primates* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[9]Ibid., 1–2.

[10]T. B. Brazelton, E. Tronick, L. Adamson, H. Als, and S. Wise, "Early Mother-Infant Reciprocity," in *Ciba Foundation Symposium* (33) (1975): 137–54.

[11]The immensely popular Attachment Theory of Bowlby posits that the infant requires a bond with a single caregiver, usually the mother. This in turn satisfies a maternal need. However, the evidence for this position is parochial. When viewed more broadly, it is clear that infant responses are not so limited.

[12]An extensive and current review of past and current theories and experimental findings on child development can be found in E. M. Hetherington, ed., *Handbook of Child Psychology Vol. IV, Socialization, Personality and Social Development* (New York: John Wiley, 1983).

[13]George Herbert Meade, *Mind, Self and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

[14]Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

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[15]Judy Dunn, *The Beginnings of Social Understanding* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 169.

[16]Felton Earls, "The Prevalence of Behavior Problems in Three Year Old Children: A Cross-National Replication," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 37 (1980): 1153–157.

[17]Phyllis A. Katz, "Developmental Foundations of Gender and Racial Attitudes," in R. L. Leahy, ed., *The Child's Construction of Social Inequality* (New York: Academic Press, 1983), 44–78.

[18]E. L. Horowitz and R. E. Horowitz, "Development of Social Attitudes in Children," *Sociometry* 1 (1938): 301–38; K. B. Clark and M. P. Clark, "Racial Identification and Preference in Negro Children," in T. M. Newcomb and E. L. Hartley, eds., *Readings in Social Psychology* (New York: Holt, 1947).

[19]William E. Cross, Jr., *Shades of Black: Diversity in African-American Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

[20]Amartya Sen, "The Profit Motive," in A. K. Sen, ed., *Resources, Values and Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 90–110.

[21]Amartya Sen, "Economics and the Family," *Asian Development Review* 1 (1983): 14–26; and Amartya Sen, "Gender and Cooperative Conflict," in Irene Tinker, ed., *Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 123–49.

[22]For a description of the social understanding of children between eighteen and thirty-six months, see Dunn, *The Beginnings of Social Understanding*.

[23]Sometimes called the "Ozzie and Harriet" family, see David Blankenhorn, "Ozzie and Harriet: Have Reports of Their Death Been Greatly Exaggerated?," *Family Affairs* 2–3 (Summer-Fall 1989): 10–14.

[24]Mary Jo Bane and Paul A. Jargowsky, "The Links Between Government Policy and Family Structure: What Matters and What Doesn't," in A. J. Cherlin, ed., *The Changing American Family and Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1988), 219–61.

[25]Blankenhorn, "Ozzie and Harriet: Have Reports of Their Death Been Greatly Exaggerated?," 10–11.

[26]US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Census, *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1990,* Current Population Reports, Series P-20, No. 450, 1–7.

[27]Sheila B. Kammerman and Alfred J. Kahn, "What Europe Does for Single-Parent Families," *Public Interest* 93 (Fall 1988): 70–86.

[28]Sheila B. Kammerman and Alfred J. Kahn, "Social Policy and Children in the United States and Europe," in J. L. Palmer, T. Smeeding, and B. B. Torrey, eds., *The Vulnerable* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1988), 351–80.

[29]John Modell, *Into One's Own: From Youth to Adulthood in the United States, 1920–1975* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

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[30]Modell's analysis shows that the mean number of years to divorce remained at six to seven years over this entire period. However, a point was approached during this interval when the percentage of divorcing couples with children began to exceed the proportion of all married couples with children.

[31]United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 171.

[32]Clair Vickery, "The Time-Poor: A New Look at Poverty," *Journal of Human Resources* 12 (1) (1977): 27–48.

[33]Victor Fuchs, *Women's Quest for Economic Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 111.

[34]Felton Earls, "The Fathers (not the Mothers): Their Importance and Influence with Infants and Young Children," *Psychiatry* 39 (1976): 209–25.

[35]Frank. F. Furstenberg, Jr., "Good Dads—Bad Dads: Two Faces of Fatherhood," in A. J. Cherlin, ed., *The Changing American Family and Public Policy* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute, 1988), 193–218.

[36]Urie Bronfenbrenner and Ann C. Crouter, "Work and Family Through Space and Time," in Sheila B. Kammerman and Cheryl D. Hayes, eds., *Families that Work: Children in a Changing World* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1982), 39–83.

[37]One can begin to get a notion of how sharply divided this field is by reading Jay Belsky, "Non-Maternal Care in the First Year of Life and Infant-Parent Attachment Security," *Child Development* 59 (1988): 157–67; Ellis Hennessey and Edward Melhuish, "Early Day Care and the Development of School-Age Children," *Journal of Reproductive and Infant Psychology* 9 (1991): 117–36; and Deborah Vandell and Mary Corasaniti, "Variations in Early Child Care: Do They Predict Subsequent Social, Emotional and Cognitive Differences?," *Early Childhood Research Quarterly* 5 (1990): 555–72.

[38]See Hennessey and Melhuish, "Early Day Care and the Development of School-Age Children," and Vandell and Corasaniti, "Variations in Early Child Care: Do They Predict Subsequent Social, Emotional and Cognitive Differences?"

[39]A. C. Huston, E. Donnerstein, H. Fairchild, N. D. Feschbach, P. A. Katz, J. P. Murray, E. A. Rubenstein, B. L. Wilcox, and D. Zuckerman, *Big World, Small Screen* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1992), 11–14.

[40]Ibid., 52.

[41]Final Report of the National Commission on Children, *Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families* (Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Children, 1991).

[42]Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *When the Bough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting Our Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

[43]We think of morals and social competence as a skill, like social and moral reasoning, and do not specify the content of moral or social beliefs, whether learned in the home, community, church or school.

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[44]Cheryl D. Hayes, John L. Palmer, and Martha J. Zaslow, eds., *Who Cares for America's Children? Child Care Policy for the 1990s* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1990).

[45]See, for example, J. Rubenstein, "The Effects of Maternal Employment on Young Children," *Applied Developmental Psychology* 2 (1985): 99–120; and L. B. Silverstein, "Transforming the Debate about Child Care and Maternal Employment," *American Psychologist* 46 (1991): 1025–1032.

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My teacher that year was different from the rest of the teachers there. She was disgusted and repelled by my sister and me, and she showed it sometimes too. She was young—about twenty-seven. . . . To me, she was striking and handsome, the career girl in the movies. Her hair was blonde and very neat. Everything about her was impeccable. Her eyes were blue; they were cold and at the same time piercing. When she was angry, she would pull her nondescript chin as far back as possible into her slender, long, by then strawberry neck. Her nostrils would puff with air and stain red, and it was as if her eyes would reach out with a surgical instrument to pick away at whatever it was in you that was annoying her. She had patience. She had concentration. . . . One had to give up to her magnetic grasp. To me in the sixth grade, a little black girl who was used to smiles and hugs and kisses, all of this registered not as an image but as a situation, situation red—danger. I was afraid, scared of her, but I hadn't mastered yet the kind of repression that she demanded; but I was learning. . . . I needed time; she didn't have it. She didn't like me. She intrigued me. I know no other word.

* * *

. . . She was indulging a vulgar habit of reading aloud the names of each student along with the grade that that kid had received on their last quiz. She read my grade. It was 100 and my grades for quite some time had been 100, but it was still quite early in the year. Nevertheless, I did want to impress her. . . . I was seated near the back of the room, minding my own business, trying to read my book and forget that she was reading the grades. Other students were quietly doing likewise or otherwise, but whatever they were doing, all were doing it quietly, very quietly. Mrs. Wernerhann did not permit any noise in her classroom: "Why Sandra, I'm really amazed. I thought certainly you would be one of my F students." The class laughed carelessly, as if they hadn't laughed in years and years and were desperate to find something funny, anything. . . . Actually, I don't remember how they laughed, it wasn't thunder in my ears but I know that they laughed, I know.

Michele Wallace
"Sixth Grade," *America Street*
Anne Mazer, ed., Persea Books, New York

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Thomas J. Cottle

Witness of Joy

I

ON A BLUSTERY FEBRUARY MORNING, I arrive at the unconscionably run-down Boston housing project that a policeman friend of mine believes should be evacuated and bombed. The scene of this sorrowful edifice is at the same time so dangerous and depressing that I understand his exasperation. Together we have wondered how people can live in such untenantable conditions, tolerate the constant smell of human waste in the hallways, and endure the noises that never cease.

I have been visiting families here for twenty years, and never do I approach the neighborhood without experiencing the same thoughts which arrive almost ritualistically. Magical mechanisms, they serve, somehow, to keep me from feeling frightened. I wonder how it is possible to live in these buildings and not feel that one was about to go crazy. I wonder what kind of world allows this sort of harsh existence, and where the children, especially the little ones, get the strength to just keep going when this is supposed to be a sanctuary.

After all these years, I have many friends at this project, some who still appear bemused by my inquiries and periodic incredulity. Most of the families accept me, honoring the fact that I am a regular visitor. But where we find common ground is in our observations of the

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children. Some of the children scare us with the intensity of their anger; some sadden us with their quiet, brittle manner almost suggesting they have quit on life. But many dazzle us with their infinite capacity to discover and nurture joy in activities and settings one would think could breed only frustration and tears.

It's 10:30 A.M. when I enter 808 Langley Court. This place has a rather infamous history. In the past year, a woman has been stabbed on the very spot on which I now stand. Against the wall, to the right of the front door, where once the entry's mailboxes were located—they long ago were ripped out leaving bare wall open to studs and lathes—a nineteen year old woman waited to be picked up by her boyfriend. Suddenly, the door flew open and a fourteen year old boy rushed in wearing black leather pants, high boots, and a T-shirt. Breathless, manic, pushed to the edge by drugs and alcohol, he spied her and impulsively went to tear at her clothes. When she resisted, he drew a knife and slashed her ten times, one of the cuts ripping open her cheek.

The attack occurred at 11:00 on a Monday night. Days after her hospitalization and the news that she would not lose the sight of her left eye, we learned that her nine year old brother and seven year old sister had been waiting with her in the hallway and had witnessed the entire episode.

There is more to the history of 808 Langley Court. Within these same two years, a twenty-four year old man died of AIDS, while a young woman of twenty-two expired giving birth to a premature baby. Finding no one to assist her but her nine year old sister, she succumbed to a hemorrhage. Two other deaths involved elderly residents. A man and a woman in their seventies, "passed," as the people here say, in the company of their families. In both instances, children witnessed the deaths. They heard the shouts for help, the wailing, and watched with terror and excitement as police and fire fighters rushed into the building through this very entrance.

Ascending the stairs, reflecting still on these juvenile witnesses to life, I ask myself, does not the viewing of these sorts of events make these children, employing the jargon of the day, victims of post-traumatic stress disorder? What sort of life can it be to watch a sister die in childbirth? How does this even happen when a few miles from here stands one of Boston's preeminent hospitals? I doubt many women die in childbirth in that institution. And surely, on those rare occasions when they do, no child would ever witness it.

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I walk along the first floor cement corridor toward the stairs. The elevators leading from the entrance hall haven't operated in years. Up the stairs to the first landing, I am met with the usual building noise: the sound of motors droning, people yelling, dogs yapping, and always the children. Some are crying, others are screaming or shouting to one another, and some are laughing. In this setting, in this darkness and raw coldness, their laughter seems incongruous.

On the second floor landing, a group of eight, nine, and ten year olds have concocted a game one can only describe as joyous. The children are feeling joy in a lugubrious hallway lit only by slivers of light coming in through a narrow landing window that has been partially boarded up. On the landing floor, the children have placed two rotting mattresses. Still emitting the scents of urine and vomit, the mattresses nonetheless provide the padding the game requires. On the wall opposite the stairs leans a third mattress also decaying, but with its padding, too, more or less in tact.

Suddenly, from the third floor, Derond Sommerset, nine years old and wearing nothing but brand new black high-top sneakers and pink shorts, this despite the coldness, is about to take a running start and slide down the ten stairs on a metal cafeteria tray. Barely long enough to span the distance between stairs, the tray actually provides him a surprisingly smooth ride to the bottom where he flies off and plumps down on the mattress. Four children watch his perfect descent. Clatter, clatter, clatter, splat, and the small audience explodes with laughter and cheering.

Derrick Whittier's turn comes next. Although grinning, I notice that his face reveals apprehension. I tell him he doesn't have to follow Derond. "It's alright Derrick to say you just don't want to do it." The other children, all of whom I know, look at me as if to say, You crazy, man? What do you mean Derrick doesn't have to go? "You're riding, ain't you, Derrick?" Derrick looks first at me and then at them. The children's joy has turned to sternness. With no other adults in the hall the dilemma must be settled exclusively by the children. If Derrick Whittier could suddenly announce, "I think I'd rather not, I'm scared," I would nominate him for a Nobel Prize. But there's about as much chance of this happening as there is that the entry's elevators will be fixed by the end of the week.

Derrick pauses, his body rigid. He looks about at the other children who barely breathe. The silence is broken with the announcement: "He's gonna ride!" The children scream with excitement. Joy has returned.

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Needless to say, no one in the hall utters a word about Feliciano Daniels, the eight year old who split his head open three weeks ago playing this same game. The cut required more than thirty stitches. The police had been called and finding no adults at home, they asked Feliciano's older sister to accompany him to the hospital. Lucky for Feliciano that Betina had skipped school, for there was no one else looking out for him that morning. When Feliciano's mother returned from work that evening and learned of her son's accident, she spanked the boy and warned him there would be hell to pay if she ever caught him playing roller coaster again. Feliciano is not one of the children in the hall this morning.

I step over the mattress and head up the stairs, two more flights, to Lynn and Jared Swilling's apartment. Naturally, I pause long enough to watch Derrick. Still frightened, he takes a diffident, walking start and lights upon the tray at the top of the landing. Within seconds he hits the mattress. He's made it. My own pulse rate has increased. I fear that someday a child is going to die from playing this game. I look down at Derrick prone on the mattress, secretly wishing he would return my look. But no, he is absolutely joyous, along with the other children who, recognizing that he has beaten his fear, jump all over him on the putrid smelling mattress.

II

Rural New Hampshire has a magnificent feeling about it this morning. There is a glow in the low hills where the colors arrange themselves like shifting fabrics, and the pine trees disappear in the gullies where the rock formations make it difficult for much to grow. Out here I understand what it means when people refer to some place as God's country. The air is clear and the smells of the pines and maples just beginning to bloom bring to mind the aromas of sumptuous foods.

Willie Dillmeister's family lives in a small white house with forest green shutters on a farm built at the base of the hills over 125 years ago. Nine year old Willie is one of four children. His parents farm and the children, including four year old Charlie, farm. Willie says he hates his older sister because she bosses him around and makes him do her chores. He says school is okay, he doesn't like to be around when his parents argue, and he worries that the family will

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not have enough money to get through the winters. Ted and Martie Dillmeister try to keep the family's money problems out of earshot of the children, but there is no way Willie could be ignorant of the daily facts of small-time New Hampshire farming. He understands about thunderstorms, low water levels, and excessive cold spells. He knows what happens if the land absorbs too much acidic rain, and what will take place in the rolling fields if the mountains beyond the foothills have not received sufficient snowfalls during the winter months.

There is often an air of trouble in this friendly but modest home. Ted has enlarged the house over the years, but it remains too small for the family. Martie works alongside her husband of thirteen years almost 24 hours a day. Both wonder how long they should go on in this manner, or whether the present New England economic crisis will finally drive them away from their beloved home in the shadow of the foothills.

I have known the Dillmeisters nine years. We met when I was interviewing families about unemployment. Ted and Martie's own terror of going under is never far from the surface. All the Dillmeisters seem more agitated these days than ever before. Money, as Ted often remarks, remains the root of his own personal evil.

Rivulets of water line Interstate 87 leading to the outskirts of the small town in which the Dillmeister's farm is located. Everything I see intimates at the ravages of a New England recession. The family claims to be excited by my arrival, but still I am self-conscious telling them I want to know how Willie and his sister Christina—known by the family as Teenie—find joy, or what they even take this word to mean. At lunch, Martie insists that my latest investigation makes a great deal of sense. She often calls Willie a joyful child, and knows precisely from what sources he draws his joyous pleasures, although she challenges me to discover them on my own.

It isn't difficult. Willie responds quickly to my questions. He is made joyous by his pets, nature, the farm animals, and in some strange way that he cannot make sense of, the land too. And then there is the matter of his mother's reading to the children at night, a ritual that no amount of financial or marital tension has ever curtailed.

"Do you know, Willie, what I mean when I ask you about joy?"

"Of course. Like, when I run down Post Road with my dogs I feel

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like, that could be joy. I'm happy then, right? That's what joy means, right? I like being outside, playing with animals, or going fishing with someone, or by myself. I can fish for a long time by myself. I think I'm joy, with joy, however you say it."

"Joyous."

"Yeah. Right. But the best is when my mother reads to us. I feel real happy then. Joyous, right? And safe. Everything seems okay, you know? Sometimes I just listen to her voice. If she asked me, like a teacher, you know, what we've been listening to, I wouldn't really know, 'cause I'm just lying on the bed listening to her voice. But I'm, like, happy, you know, listening to her read. It's the best. It's like I say, I feel happy and safe, not that anything's going to happen to us while we're in the bed."

Later that afternoon, as Willie and I walk and watch the steam from our breaths magically disappear in the cool air, I imagine he is about to tell me that joy for him comes from being, somehow, transported. Whether it is by nature, the scents rising from the fields, the wild runs with Pepper and Geronimo, the Dillmeister's golden retrievers, or just lying on Teenie's bed listening to his mother read, Willie seems to grope for the words to capture transcendence and moving beyond the everyday realities of rural New Hampshire living. I even believe I see a joyous look come over him as, squinting slightly, he scans the foothills, letting his eyes roam the boundaries of his family's property. I know for a fact that that expression was not there earlier when I asked him about school. The look appeared first when I asked him how he would spend his summer, and he spoke dreamily of going swimming in the rushing current of the Calhoun River and taking overnight hikes with his father.

When I ask him whether he thinks about what he might do when he gets older—a question I normally find painfully uncreative—I detect a different look, one of concern perhaps. If I had to bet, I'd say that Willie will not end up on this farm. I'd say that ten years from now he'll have to find new sources of joy, and that fact causes him sadness. Willie seems so young when we speak about his joyous pursuits, so much older when the conversation shifts to what he might become.

Willie's joy is palpable. It derives in part from this modest community and this farm. It derives from his play and work, and from the sanctuary created by his mother's reading. His spirit rises,

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but the joy doesn't last long, however, in his telling of it. I suspect it endures when he actually lives these experiences, and particularly when he is allowed to be alone with his thoughts. Then again, he is only nine. It is tempting to say that the land, somehow, ages him, but it is the fright of financial ruin and the fear that his parents may separate that curtails the joy I am convinced I see in him.

His parents recognize this as well and lament it. Martie is not certain that her love and concern for the children will be enough to give birth to some permanent joyfulness of character. In her eyes, and mine as well, Willie is a touching admixture of joyfulness and apprehension. It seems a strange recipe for a child, but come to think of it, the tray sliders in 808 Langley Court revealed the same antinomious qualities.

Willie laughs at my description of the Boston children. It prompts him to tell me about leaping into a mountain pond after pushing Geronimo in before him. "That was my favorite day so far," he says. In fact he cannot tell the story of Geronimo without gales of laughter erupting. "That's the biggest joy," he continues, trying to give a good answer to my questions, exactly as his mother has admonished him to do. "The really biggest joy so far."

Driving home before the sun disappears behind the hills, I wonder whether a child like Willie Dillmeister makes up answers merely to appease me. Does he contrive the feeling because at some level he feels his life is joyless? Is joy, in other words, a compensation, akin somehow to the response one hears from adults who have grown up in poverty but claim that when they were young they thought all people lived as they did? It is a sentiment difficult to accept in this generation as television introduces people to the face of wealth at every turn of the dial. Today's poor children know full well that not everyone lives as they do.

So does Willie honestly know moments of pure joy? I suspect he does. His mother prays that he does. His father believes joy isn't something one need bother oneself about, particularly when crops are meager and money scarce. Without uttering a word, I know that Ted feels my investigation to be the act of extravagance and leisure. Perhaps it is, but should the opportunity ever arise, I will suggest that children should know periods of joy. They should know how to mine an activity so that it yields joy, and derive joy from something one does with one's brain or muscles. They should learn how to play, as well as learn that just as feeling competent may yield joy, so too does

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intellectual discovery and the ability to be touched by the strength and beauty of one's physical environment.

III

Eight year old Hillary Franklin knew joy the afternoon she came home from school having rehearsed the role of Mary in the Christmas play. Marian Franklin claimed her daughter was literally "off the wall" with happiness. Knowing of my interest in joy, Marian tried to copy down verbatim Hillary's words when her child was so excited she actually "forgot" to sit down in front of the television as she did most every afternoon.

"I have to sing this song," Hillary began, "and it's long, real long, about Jesus. And Mr. Treblehorn said I did it great. He said 'great!' He said it a lot. Great, great, great. And you know how you know when some teachers say things they really don't mean but they have to say it because, like, it's their job? Well, he meant it. He told me he did."

"What makes you feel the happiest about it?" Marian asked her daughter, admittedly sounding more like a psychologist than a mother.

"I like being the star of the play," came Hillary's reply. "I really do, Mom. This is what I'm going to do, you know."

"It is? Well, this is the first I learn of this."

Marian's description of her own affectlessness reminded me of my manner years ago as a psychologist in training. I know I saw the children more as patients, obsessive compulsives, nocturnal bed wetters, and aggressive acting outers than as children, sometimes triumphing, sometimes joyous, but mostly struggling and confused.

"Oh, Mom," Hillary is reported to have proclaimed impatiently, "I've *always* wanted to be a star. You knew that. I told you a hundred times."

"You never did, darling," Marian protests.

"You're lying, Mom. You're lying, which is the worst thing you can do. I always know when you're lying 'cause your nose sort of wrinkles up. And you want me to be a star, too, don't you, Mom? I mean, I'm not always going to get good parts, like Mr. Treblehorn said. But he said if that's what I want to do, that's what I should do."

"And you should," Marian responds, later describing her role in the conversation to be a bit like confronting a runaway freight train.

"I will, I will, I will," Hillary is reported to have shouted.

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Hillary Franklin's joy seems to have been born in some fabulous connections she has made, Mr. Treblehorn being a significant part of them. She has discovered an activity that "joys" her, to use the expression of six year old Benjamin Parsons, another child from Langley Court. Everything in life has to "joy" Benny or he won't do it, which includes going to bed which "downs" him because of his fear of nightmares.

What "joyed" Hillary was feeling something that both thrilled her and someone else, someone apparently whose assessment meant the world to her. Listening to Marian, I was struck with the almost defiant inner strength that Hillary had brought to that conversation. She had found the outlines of a dream and a teacher had made it seem possible. And from it, a wholly new sense of competence and definition of self had emerged.

Identity, Erik Erikson wrote, is a complex combination of change and continuing sameness. The child knows both ingredients. Indeed, the static and dynamic truths of one's life, as Robert Persig recently has written, probably are known well by the child, despite our belief that such concepts appear too recondite to be grasped by the likes of a Willie Dillmeister or Hillary Franklin. Ironically, it is the sense of continuing sameness from which a New Hampshire farmer's child draws one source of joy. One suspects that even at nine, Willie is apprehensive about departing this scene with its predictable chores and constantly changing beauty.

In a suburb of Providence, Rhode Island, Hillary Franklin has found joy in change. Having discovered yet another layer of this magical thing called the self, she is not today what she was yesterday. A new layer, a new cavern, a new landscape has opened for her. She may be nine years old, she may adore television, but on this afternoon she has discovered one of the mysteries constructed by heaven knows what. Genetics, biology, physiology, chemistry, temperament, talent, environment, parental behavior, whatever it is, something has been awakened in her. So today she and "it" are cavorting about, in a sense celebrating a special sort of birthday.

Hillary's joy represents the discovery of a form of intelligence: She can perform. Something has emerged in her that she herself fetched from some inner space without even thinking about it. But there it was for people to witness, and the week before Christmas, still more people will witness it. And contrary to her mother's nervous concern, the fact that others will watch her only makes her more joyous.

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Does a child understand the differences between the static and dynamic, or between the sense of sameness and continuing change? Surely they know the difference between the boredom of certain static properties and the serenity of other ones. In the same way, they know the thrill of certain dynamic qualities and the terror of other ones. And while this is all conjecture, I suspect children are able to distinguish between a personal discovery, one that transports them to a new station in life, and the act of distraction meant to carry them away from some ongoing station, but which in the end rarely yields them anything resembling genuine joy.

The culture thrives on entertaining young children, getting their minds "off of it," whatever "it" may be. Granted, children feel pleasure in front of movie or television screens, but I am convinced it is not joy that is being instilled and felt, since joy is not a substance to be instilled. For many children, joy comes as the result of mining something unique and wondrous about themselves from some inner shaft. Distractions may please the child, but it is not until something from the inner world is triggered that genuine joy has the possibility of rising to the surface.

I told Marian that self-discovery and finding that one has worth remain awfully close to the realm of joy, assuming the discovery has gone well. Sometimes self-discovery yields pain. But who knows, perhaps the pain of certain self-discoveries lies closer to joy than does the dullness rising from the unexamined life, even for children.

> "And children can do all this?" she asked.
>
> "But of course," I replied confidently, knowing full well that romanticism and exuberance rather than hard earned data braced my theory. "Hey, what the hell, Marian, if you don't feel joy when you learn you're doing great being the mother of Jesus, then *when* are you going to!"

IV

Approval, I've always argued, is the lubricant of the child's search for his or her inner selves. The magic of Hillary Franklin's joy was made possible in part by a teacher's approval. There is a sense of genuine esteem promoting approval that this child felt, something more than merely Mr. Treblehorn's capacity to guide her. Through his approval, she was able to lower herself down into those magical caves of her essential being. In contrast, when you hate yourself,

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you don't go looking for yourself. You don't play this sacred hide and seek game because you're convinced all you'll find is confirmation of the "data" that convinced you in the first place to hate yourself.

Self-hating children experience little joy. I tend to think that children like the Langley Court tray sliders remain unaccepted by a greater unseen culture that never would admit to it, but nonetheless must take responsibility and offer an explanation for the children's treacherous living conditions. But these children are not necessarily self-hating. Certain factors and certain people have intervened to buffer them against some of the assaults of the dominant culture.

I speak here of nothing mystical or evanescent. Ten year old Maya Pinkerton was often beaten by her father before he finally abandoned the family. It seems possible that someone else may have sexually molested her as well. Her mother, having given birth to Maya when she herself was only fourteen years old, is rarely at home. Maya's cousin, Janet, a child a few months older, was also abandoned by a father and raised by a drug-addicted mother who made her smoke cigarettes when she was six. Neighbors report that the woman also attempted to turn Maya and her two brothers on to drugs before their tenth year. And still, both of these children know joy. Sometimes it appears when I watch them playing together on the back porch of Maya's tiny two-room apartment in a poor neighborhood of Boston. But mostly I detect it when they cook with their grandmother.

Anna Turnbull, a woman in her late forties, has committed herself to making these two children happy and successful. She knows well the handicaps she faces, the children's mothers who have transgressed, the fathers who, unable to find steady work, eventually abandoned their families. Anna is willing to admit that she has selected these two grandchildren at the cost of losing her other ones, but she does not question this decision. In her words, the very definition of her being is to make these girls "come alive" and "know the greatness that's sleeping there somewhere." And when these three cook together, there is consummate joy in the tiny alcove that serves as "Mamo's" kitchen.

It is not only joy that one notices, but intense concentration, hard work, and responsibility. Mamo barks out the orders with good nature and the two girls jump to the bait. Eating seems almost anticlimactic. And again, I regularly see the communication of

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approval and the children's sense of confidence emerging from this approval.

A peculiar combination of experiences appears to unfold in these cooking exercises. The children are simultaneously playing and working; that goes without saying. It also goes without saying that if more teachers could capture this spirit, children would long to be in class. But to listen to Mamo tell it, these children are being rescued as well. Redemption is being served up in that kitchen; Maya and Janet are being pulled back from social and human dangers.

Some theorists suggest that children face an almost insurmountable task attempting to overcome absent or unloving parents. Little, it is alleged, ever can compensate for the loss of parental love and approval; they remain palpable hurts never to be fully healed. In contrast, other writers suggest that children require support and love from any quarter; it almost doesn't matter who, precisely, provides the love, although quite often one looks to the mother's mother to become that special well spring, even if she failed to provide in this manner for her own children.

Mamo Turnbull is actually no different from many grandmothers with whom I have visited over the years. She is quick to point out that the joy she never provided her own children now will be provided to her grandchildren, or at least to these two girls. Like many other grandmothers, Mamo believes that joy must come from within, but at least one significant person, who regularly befriends and openly loves the children, must help them to find joy within themselves and bring it forth.

Mamo's notions seem simplistic, probably, to sophisticated students of psychology. What allows a child to feel joyful often seems bitterly complex. One imagines joy as a flame. Like all flames it needs oxygen, some life force, a combustible material, a significant activity, and then the white heat of profound effort or activity leading ultimately to inner satisfaction, if not ebullience. The flame one finds in Mamo's kitchen is the result of powerful love forces and exquisite hands-on teaching techniques battling against the forces of despair, poverty, abandonment, pain, and humiliation. Perhaps joy only emerges as some antithetical dynamic: pleasure winning out over pain, competence winning out over incompetence, a belief that one is good, sound, and smart winning out over a well established conviction that one is bad, worthless, sorely incomplete, and ignorant. Children who in one manner or another describe themselves as damaged goods rarely reveal joy.

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These notions, too, each one meant to explain how rudimentary kitchen practices could produce joy in a child, also must sound childishly simplistic. Nonetheless, two thoughts come to mind. First, one senses that at some level joy eternally remains a childlike sensation. Joy is child-size rapture and ecstasy. Once felt, it is rarely forgotten, although it may not be so easily reexperienced. Adults who recall joyous fishing trips, wondrous checkers matches or playing catch with a parent feel that childlike sense of joy, although tears may accompany these recollections. These tears are often called tears of joy.

Adults who master something and for an instant feel youthful, immortal, and blessed with unlimited capacities, also feel that joy. One's body tingles with it. The little flame still burns, we tell ourselves, but how is it kept alive when one is encumbered by repetitive actions leading to no new corridors or secret attics? Creative artists report that joy unquestionably is part of their childhood keepsakes into which they actively tap. What some of us call mere objects, the creative view as toys. And what some of us call satisfying accomplishment, these same people, unwilling to part with childlike characteristics, call shear joy.

Second is the matter of one person making childhood joy possible for another. It seems simplistic even to suggest it, just as it seems simplistic to state that little boys and girls do best when raised by men and women who love them and one another. Still, I am struck by the fact that among the affluent families with whom I have been conducting research, the loss of a parent seems almost unbearable to the mourning child. Among poorer families, these same feelings are revealed upon the deaths of grandparents as well, and particularly that one special grandmother, the Mamo Turnbull's of the world.

How many times will I hear graveside or days later in a home, a reference to the end of joy. "Now with her passing," Miko Dwyer, a ten year old told me upon the death of her grandmother, her cheeks bathed in tears, "I can't ever be happy again. She was the only person in the world who ever made me totally happy. I'll never feel that way again. She stole all my joy when she died." Those of us who have befriended Miko know the importance to her of that noble grandmother. All of us know as well that a light that once shown in Miko's eyes has gone off and has not reappeared. It has been three years since Mother Accosta passed away.

A few months ago, I asked Miko whether she still thought her grandmother's death was truly the completion of any joy in her life.

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"So far," she replied laconically.

"It's almost as though," I suggested, "if we could pump it up from the cemetery ground, maybe we could get it back for you."

Miko smiled. "I wish we could. But I'll have to find it somewhere else so my own children get their share. It's not enough to make them laugh. You have to do what my grandmother did, and I think the secret's buried with her. Well, you know what sort of person she was. She just had joy in her heart, like the minister said. And she gave it all to me."

V

Miko Dwyer's words hardly confirm social scientific hypotheses, but they do reinforce my suspicion of the need for adults to give joy implants to those children who need something more complicated than amusement. To laugh is not necessarily to know joy. Indeed, one suspects the presence of joy among children who may be toiling hard at some task. The heavy breathing, the intense concentration, the extraordinary physical or intellectual effort, and then finding the joy of the Eureka. They've got it, or they suddenly have figured out what it is they've got, or are meant to get. Ask teachers about this matter and many of them, at least those who themselves know joy, believe the search for it in a classroom is an academic requirement that ought to be part of every curriculum.

One such teacher is Melanie Dickerson, whose Boston fifth grade class regularly scintillates with antic discussion and theatrical exchanges. One cannot allege with certainty that joy abounds in this classroom everyday, but something goes on here that causes the children to report that Mrs. Dickerson is the greatest teacher in the whole wide world.

Among her charges is eleven year old Tanya Dade, a tall, slow moving child with sunken eyes and a habit of looking down at the ground. Tanya is more than shy; somewhere along the line she has been hurt. Her story is familiar to Mrs. Dickerson, a woman in her late fifties who returned to teaching ten years ago after a layoff of fifteen years when she was devoted to raising her own three children. Now she has committed herself to raising the twenty-six children in her class.

"Tanya," she tells me, "is the American story. I rarely saw it before I took my time off. Now it's an everyday occurrence." Apparently Tanya's parents went through an angry separation that essentially

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has never been resolved. Although legally divorced, the parents continue to disparage one another, whether in earshot of their children or not. Mrs. Dickerson also suspects that Tanya was molested. The child has spoken of nightmares, some peculiar flashbacks, and she reveals an angry self dislike. She cannot accept praise and openly refuses presents from anyone. Moreover, she periodically exhibits the characteristic startle pattern of trauma victims. A door closing goes unnoticed by most of the children, but Tanya's body lurches, and she throws her head around as if ready to confront a dangerous perpetrator, or so it seems to this perspicacious elementary schoolteacher.

After six months of working with the children, Mrs. Dickerson sees progress in Tanya. Progress for her is not limited to grades which she always has claimed are an impediment to teaching. She, too, is looking for a spark in the eyes, that flame again, or merely an increase in the number of minutes Tanya will look up at her rather than peer down at the floor. She looks for signs of enthusiasm, an interest in something beyond everyday classroom assignments, or a momentary lifting of Tanya's mood that like a heavy cloak engulfs this child and palpably drags her down. In a word, she looks for "signs of life from the inside," as she calls it, and enjoys any allusion to the child's inner caves and the human expedition to personal truths. She knows, however, that Tanya is all too familiar with the caves. If there has been trauma, this child remembers enough of it. The question is how to get at it and not let the memories remain permanent sources of torment and grief.

Noting Tanya's sadness, along with some other problems in several of her students, Melanie Dickerson proposes that the children keep diaries that no one will ever be allowed to see. Tanya and the others are free to write and draw in their books whenever they wish, and are not obliged to show their musings and representations to anyone. Hearing Tanya's fear that her diary may be discovered at her home, Mrs. Dickerson agrees not only to keep the diary for the child, but promises to take it home with her every evening. Tanya smiles; it is exactly what she had hoped for. Amazing, I note to myself, how good teachers not only train young minds to read, but read the minds of those they train.

Early in the fall, Mrs. Dickerson brings new diaries to class with her. They sit in a locked cabinet to which only she carries the key. I notice that at no time does any child threaten to read the diary of another or even tease a child by pretending to read over his or her

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shoulder. The respect for the diaries is exemplary. How ironic that these same children cannot contain their reactions in the presence of an obese child. Robbie Humphries receives unmerciful teasing about his weight, but the diary writers hear not a single derogatory remark. Nothing, moreover, is ever said about Mrs. Dickerson reading the diaries. Whether or not the children assume she will read them remains yet another mystery.

My own guess is that the children want her to read every word and inspect every drawing. Knowing the impeccable integrity of this one teacher, I bet she would not dare to open a book without first telling the author. But I am wrong. In fact she regularly inspects these documents and often brings certain issues to the attention of people who might help a child.

The children are using the diaries to work out issues they may not understand, and communicate their findings to a trusted friend. Tanya clearly is doing this. She is unloading details of her childhood—as if at eleven she had completed childhood—in the hopes of accomplishing something that neither Mrs. Dickerson nor I are quite certain. But evidently there is an urge to seek out those inner caves where pain and joy live, and then share her daily journey with her teacher.

At one point, I tell Melanie that Tanya seems to be doing therapy on herself. Melanie responds by saying she believes the work of this one saddened eleven year old is nothing short of free association, and hence psychoanalysis. Her accompanying look tells me there is no room for me to disagree.

After six months of diary work, psychoanalysis if you will, Tanya Dade is changing. The eyes are lifting, the morose mood is in retreat, and I see occasional smiles on the face of this ostensibly lonely child. Nothing goes better at home, at homes I should say, as Tanya splits her weeks in the houses of her mother and father. Their own battles continue apace, but some inner peace seems to have taken hold in Tanya. She used to feel anxiety thinking about the Tuesday/Wednesday stay with her father. She used to dread bedtime and would postpone its arrival employing every child's trick in the book, which meant of course that she would come to school exhausted every morning. But this too has changed somewhat.

Just before Thanksgiving vacation, Mrs. Dickerson, recognizing Tanya's bedtime terror, suggests a simple assignment. "Do you think you could draw a nightmare?" Tanya nods yes. Now, months later, it is reported to me that Tanya looks directly into the eyes of her teacher, grins slightly, and eagerly responds to questions put to

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her in class. During the months of December and January, Tanya's diary becomes filled with what she calls her nightmare series, dozens of drawings capturing her fright and the recurrent theme of being ripped open by an overpowering monster. Never once does Tanya raise the question of whether Mrs. Dickerson is reading her diary; a game continues to be played. The child knows the teacher is peeking, the teacher knows she is meant to peek. I find the entire process perfectly legitimate and beautifully symbolic. How else will we ever learn anything about our true selves or the selves we claim to love if we never peek.

In this same light is the child who feels joy at the exact moment she swims under water for the first time with open eyes and cannot wait to surface and scream for her mother's attention. Peek at a diary? Why, most children, it would seem, only draw so that their parents will study the new creation that adorns the refrigerator door.

Mrs. Dickerson is peeking; she even writes notes to Tanya. There is growing evidence to support the hunch that there has been some form of molestation. Tanya seems increasingly eager to make this point known. Seven months since the inception of the diary exercise, Tanya Dade is approaching that feeling of relief which both she and Melanie describe as joy. Tanya is admitting that trauma has occurred, and is beginning to control the nightly arrival of the nightmare terror born years ago. She is beginning to realize, furthermore, that she can render herself safe only by believing that the past will not return with full force and in full reality. In part this is made possible by warding off the demons, by facing them dead on, and by reliving some of her earlier experiences.

There is, furthermore, a witness to her internal odyssey. Mrs. Dickerson lovingly accepts every description and representation. Tanya is drawing nightmares. She is drawing molestation. She is drawing people fighting and yelling, people frightened and being hurt. "What is happening here?" Mrs. Dickerson asks, pointing to a corner of a drawing. "And what do you think the child is feeling here?"

Is it therapy, this march toward freedom and joy? Absolutely, although Tanya would never consider visiting a psychiatrist or psychologist. Don't think her parents haven't tried to get her "to see someone," as the expression goes. Anyway, she knows she is doing the required work with Mrs. Dickerson whom she tells me is the only woman in the world she can trust.

"Are there men in the world you can trust?" I ask.

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Tanya looks at me, and for the first time ever I see her smile broadly. She utters not a word. The message is clear: Men are not yet to be trusted. She continues to grin.

Mrs. Dickerson claims Tanya now appreciates something resembling joy. In this instance it is neither the Eureka phenomenon nor the experience of competence, although both are part of it. It's neither the joy of cooking cheeseburgers with peppers under the tutelage of one's grandmother nor the joy of sliding down the stairs in a darkened hallway on a serving tray.

In Tanya's case, Melanie explains, the child for the first time in her conscious life is able to recognize that she can pull herself back from a dangerous precipice. She can control her life, or at least some of her primary feelings. She has indeed regained control. No longer the terrified victim (as it turned out, of a male baby-sitter's assaults), she is discovering external and most assuredly internal strength. She has spent seven months operating on herself, the diaries confirming that almost daily she has dared herself to go one more step, and still one more step in the direction of those inner caves.

The diaries confirm, as Mrs. Dickerson alleges, that not only does Tanya generally fear less, she is growing less fearful of feeling fear. This is Tanya's new joy: life can be led without trepidation and doubt, without unthinking, almost without instinctual hesitation and diffidence. She is now daring, Mrs. Dickerson observes, purposely omitting the words "to live" that ought to follow the utterance. Her words are apt.

VI

On a beach ringed with high rocky cliffs that jut into the sea forming lacy coves, I observe two examples of children being daring. The first is a lovely girl with blond hair, the color of straw, and a husky voice. She appears to be about five, but her speech is that of a child less than three. The child's face reveals her genetic condition: Down's syndrome.

Protected by a tan umbrella, she sits in the sand between two women I presume to be her mother and grandmother. Suddenly she manufactures a game. She grabs the sun hat off her grandmother who just as quickly grabs it back and replaces it on her head. The child watches carefully, and then, predictably, grabs the hat a second time. Once again, the grandmother fetches it back and puts it on her head.

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By this point and knowing that a third, fourth, and fifth recurrence of the vaudeville-like ritual is in the offing, the child clearly is evincing joy. Her face veritably dances with delight. She has created a game of simple rules but spectacular results.

Grandmother plays her role to the hilt and the child roars with laughter. What has started as a daring escapade has evolved into a ritual of pure joy. But suddenly the mother barks, "Stop!" and the father follows with, "Bad!" The child's face falls. I swear I see her eyes droop. Joy is gone; an exhilarating feeling has been shot dead. Grandmother does not protest. The dare has not ended well, nor endured nearly long enough.

Down the beach in one of the rocky coves, a group of children climb to a small promontory from where they will leap into the sea. I am barely in earshot of their jibes to one another, but their bodies tell the story of their constant daring, the acceptance of the dares, and the utter dejection caused by the refusal to accept. Like the tray sliders, when the children leap from the rocky shelf and discover upon emerging from the black water that they have survived, one hears their whoops of joy over the sounds of the surf.

Strange, I think, if children allegedly believe they will live forever, an assertion professionals put forth as a reason for wild driving, drinking sprees, and drug experimentation, why then do these little children who have never steered a car or poured a drink know the joy derived from escaping serious injury or death? Is one to conclude that children believe in their own immortality except on those occasions when they fear they may die? Is it possible that the two sensations coexist within the same developing mind? Challenging death surely brings forth the propensity for joy; believing in one's immortality, apparently, doesn't even ward off depression in some children.

The children who smack into the mattresses or disappear beneath the swirling water evidently have won something. They reveal the same ebullience young athletes reveal when they have accomplished something outstanding, and triumph. Winning at something, therefore, also carries the propensity for joy, although as we have noted, it is hardly the only requirement.

I am suddenly reminded of an almost epiphanal scene I had witnessed one April evening as the light slowly disappeared on a suburban baseball field. A group of girls were practicing for an upcoming game. The girls were wearing batting helmets and taking hefty cuts from both sides of the plate. They were razzing each other

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about a huge swing that yielded a piddling trickle of a hit. Everywhere the girls were squealing with joy when one of their mates did something sensational. "Way to hit it, Lizzie." "Whee, let's hear it for the Lizard!" And always the consummate confirmation of joy: "Awesome!"

I wonder whether one girl I saw with freckles and a long ponytail feels the same joy when Lizzie rifles one out beyond the left fielder as when she herself does it? For that matter, *can* she do it? She did seem rather diminutive, even for this nine and ten year old group. Does she even have to do it in order to experience joy? One senses that a boy must be the agent of the action in order to derive the joy. But these girls, playing the sport I played a thousand years ago at precisely the same time of day, dusk, when only athletes can see, are finding joy in other people's accomplishments. They are so in tune with their little baseball community they actually delight in anyone's success. There is only one word to describe the joy I felt in witnessing these athletes: Awesome!

Leaving this scene, I once again reflect on a community's commitment to children. The parents, or some of them, are active in it, but other people, unrelated to the children, play roles, more major perhaps than ever is acknowledged. I love scenes of this type, yet invariably they evoke a bitterness in me. Why is it that America lets so many children die, go uneducated, live with illnesses their families cannot afford to have treated? Why is it that rather than bringing joy to all children, the culture refuses to find the resources to uplift all children and allow them to discover the intelligences, no matter what their form, that they all possess?

Perhaps I should be called a bleeding-heart liberal. But how many children will bleed tonight from a gunshot wound or a stabbing, or because they have been battered? Bleeding-heart liberal or not, who can refute the statistics that people working with children earn less money than people performing the analogous tasks with adults. One need only compare the salaries of kindergarten teachers with those of university professors, or lawyers dedicated to juvenile work with their counterparts in adult criminal law.

Sometimes joy comes from community organization, which means that town budgets and a culture's value structure become invisible integers in the algebra of joy. Children don't think much about such deliberations, but many of them have learned not to wait for the community of adults to bring them joy or joyous possibilities. They

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will find it, as we saw, in a putrid mattress and rusting tray or on the narrow, grassy paths leading to the low foothills.

VII

Joan Erikson wrote of the birth of recognition when she described a mother looking at her tiny baby. Psychologist Jerome Kagan would later remind us that this primitive "I know you" phenomenon requires the mother to be looking full face at the child. Seeing this full face, most babies not only smile, but their bodies may convulse slightly. Their arms and legs jump off the mattress as they reveal not the patterns of being startled, but the patterns of primitive recognition. In that instant, they are as excited to see and be seen as those children were who overcame their fear and leapt into the sea. Come to think of it, those children, too, were gaining recognition, as was Lizzie when she smacked that pitch to the left-field wall. "We saw that," the girls were implicitly yelling out to her, "and we saw you too."

Recognition has a more familiar meaning. It suggests a superior status. Recognition in this context is granted and received, and thereby connotes social status. For the child, personal and social recognitions also carry the propensity for joy. Children will be seen then reseen in new contexts—like Hillary Franklin—and in this way will end up being something different than what they were moments before. The so-called moment of recognition for the child not only marks a notable moment on an old clock, it starts up a new clock as well, thereby confirming one's old being while simultaneously launching a new being. In this way, recognition becomes central to Erik Erikson's assertion that identity contains both static and dynamic components.

Children of eight, nine, and ten reveal another aspect of the joy of recognition. It appears in their complicated ambivalence about being seen or noticed. Children often claim they enjoy looking at people, but we know that being seen is the rich reward of people watching. Tanya Dade's gaze that habitually fell to the floor literally had to be lifted by Mrs. Dickerson in order for the child to receive recognition. This action highlights what we mean when we say I needed to talk with her eyeball-to-eyeball.

Children walk through school unaware of what it is that makes them self-conscious. Is it that they are looking at someone and fearing

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that they may be caught in the act? Are they perhaps fearing (or wishing) that a certain someone will look at them, and then, awesome, know their name? Many children will tell you complicated stories of how they don't like their names, and while some of these convoluted accounts bespeak battles with parents and family origins, identity formation, esteem, and heaven knows what else, they also reveal a foundation of recognition. When, after all, someone knows my name, I am recognized.

What's in a (child's) name?—the commencement of his or her capacity to be recognized. "How'd you know my name?" one child asks another, partly bemused, partly curious, but mainly enthralled. Children collect autographs because names are slices of human recognition. The child is now in touch with the author of the autograph. The autograph symbolizes a personal connection between two people, at least this is how the child interprets it. And recognition and joy spill all over it.

A great teacher recognizes her students, and not merely their work or efforts. She touches them, hugs them, honors and loves them. By their early teenage years, children barely are able to articulate what they feel about recognition. But at eight or nine and then again in high school, there is no holding the child back. They are more than quick to tell you of the joy they feel from having a teacher like them. Part of the privilege of being thirteen is to grumble, "It doesn't matter." Part of the makeup of the nine year old is being able to tell your parents how much you *really* love Mrs. Dickerson.

A final word about recognition. When Tanya Dade looks deep within herself and lets go of some of her secrets, when in Melanie Dickerson's terms she performs her psychoanalytic work, a form of recognition is taking place. Tanya is reknowing herself, which provides her yet another opportunity to develop new feelings about herself, or at least this new and transitory self. Tomorrow, when more of the inner caves will be explored, the process of reknowing, recognition, and hopefully, too, reliking oneself commences all over again.

In this regard, amusement and entertainment do not carry the day. They fail, partly, because too little is explored or learned, and little resembling recognition has taken place. The child, again, is only being diverted, or having something evoked which is then quickly dismissed in favor of yet another diversion. Albeit pleasurable, diversion when it is not alienating rarely provides the path to genuine recognition and joy.

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What is missing here is that rare opportunity not only to rediscover, recontextualize (as Hillary Franklin was doing) or recreate yourself (as Mamo Turnbull was attempting to do with her granddaughters), but the possibility of falling in love with yourself, ideally, all over again. Psychoanalysts call the process "healthy narcissism." If I examine my own image in that mythic pool and don't fall in and drown, but decide instead that the image is lovable, I am on my way to knowing joy. When, in contrast, I learn that nothing about me is lovable, that nothing I do prompts me to love me, then ultimately I suspect my life to be a joyless pursuit of inevitably empty tasks or accomplishments.

Good families, good schools and communities, good teachers and coaches allow children the opportunity to fall in love with themselves. I am never concerned about children getting fat heads. In fact I want them all to have fat heads; it's the thin heads, like Tanya Dade, that disturb me. Besides, the notorious fat head is merely compensating for the fact that he cannot locate lovable qualities within himself.

VIII

In a quarter of a century of observing, speaking, and playing with children, it is more than evident that some of them, not so simply, are born with a capacity to find joy, whereas others, perhaps their own siblings, appear to be complete strangers to this capacity. Little seems to please them; not much causes them to laugh. It is as though the joy wiring has not been properly hooked up. I am continually struck by this temperamental variation when I observe poor children who have been diagnosed malnourished and yet at times squeal with joy. I think of it, too, when I see depressed children living in homes of extraordinary grandeur and wealth. What could have gone wrong that these children wouldn't know feelings like glee, giddiness, and joy?

Of course we know the answers to these questions. With every social advantage leaning their way, affluent children, albeit carrying with them a sense of entitlement, as Robert Coles described it, by temperament or experience, may be a million miles from joy. Classical psychotherapies, furthermore, may not always be able to draw them closer to the sources of it.

Not so strangely, in all the homes I visit, grand and decrepit alike, televisions blare and children sit before them. America's children see

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all the shows they are "meant" to see. They know all the actors, all the American music and lyrics. Joy, or the lack of it, somehow is bound up with this electronic phenomenon as well, but I'm not certain that anyone yet knows precisely what the correlations or even the variables may be. One thought, however, on the connection of joy and television comes to mind.

It goes without saying that television cannot develop vocabularies. In fact, it stunts vocabularies. For example, children feel comfortable with the verb "dis," which is television shorthand for showing *dis*respect. Television, of course, does enhance visual imagery and thereby exercises an elaborate cognitive apparatus. But the child's consciousness is being bombarded by visual stimuli that rarely last more than a few seconds. The process may be likened to fireworks—brilliant and consciousness consuming, but with no possibility of enduring.

The concomitants of recognition, seeing and being seen, necessarily are accentuated by television; the medium offers constant practice in viewing if not in imagining. Missing, however, are the ingredients that would help even the smallest child connect visual representations to the inner world where significant calculations, interpretations, and analyses are constructed. Presently, the connections appear to be made only between visual images and evocative expressions. Television too regularly evokes little more in the child than evocation.

At very least, children must learn to represent and describe experience to themselves, and then make sense of that experience. Jerome Bruner calls this "narrative thinking." One wonders whether television, in its essentially entertainment mode, helps children to do this. But if children do make sense of reality, must this sense ineluctably be couched in visual terms? While there is no question that visual stimuli and the responses to them can produce joy—the Greeks called the phenomenon *amor*—I don't know that joy automatically is enhanced by this constantly changing rush of visual treats.

A more benign view of television has it that postliterate children, belonging to the new age of electronic tribalism, are encountering new definitions of joy. What is reality, then, to the electronic-age child is anything that can be seen. Conversely, that which is read presumably cannot be real, for nothing, essentially, has been seen. The child makes the same claims about his or her dreams. I saw it in my mind's eye and hence it must be true. Or similarly, after seeing

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something I felt something and that constitutes the entirety of my response. What need is there for old-fashioned reason if seeing and feeling are all that are required for action!

In the main, children appear to recognize television's evocative power; surely stuff becomes stirred up inside them. The question is, what happens to it? Do children in their narrative reasoning have the intellectual equipment to make any sense of it? Joy requires more than stuff being stirred up. A certain intellectual and reasoned capstone must sit atop the evocation so that, as artists say, "it all works."

The very nature of consciousness is shifting by dint of regular and ongoing television viewing. If nothing else, the capacity to make sense of utterly unending messages and themes builds an inherently ahistoric intellectual foundation in the child. In turn, the child's sense of causation is effected since interconnections of television themes and story lines are often tenuous at best. Thus, new premises of joy most likely will be born of these new cognitive demands and styles. Surely the proclivity for joy in discourse already has been eroded.

Willie Dillmeister not withstanding, I suspect that fewer and fewer children are gaining joy from what we ancient ones used to call the life of the mind. Even college students tend to view the life of the mind more in terms of academic requirements than as sources of mind play. To mimic something children do when they sing commercial jingles or lip-sync rap lyrics seems to be eroding the source of the joy of creation. At least I fear this to be the case. Then again, as Persig and others warn, we must not only perpetuate the old, but establish the new. So perhaps children do find joy in being able to do what their heroes do: sing, dance, dunk a basketball, walk that special walk, wear those special shoes.

There is no question that one of the implicit messages of television is that personality is all and all. We even have a new vocation known as the "television personality." For children, the dynamic at work here is classical identification with, ironically, the smaller than life figures they see on the tube. Heroes or not, real or not, television has created a whole new meaning of the concept of celebrity. To see a rock or television star in person clearly brings joy to the child. But think now of small children unconsciously modeling their lives after these celebrities, or experiencing joy as taught by seemingly real but nonetheless fictional characters.

The emphasis, therefore, on the new joy may lie in this identification with the major players of popular culture, the new class of

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artists. Primarily through television, the culture urges children closer to show business and farther away from the professions my parents put forth as acceptable options. One implication of this transformation is that the sort of quiet reminders required in traditional schools—psychology, religion, personal discovery—must give way to new dramaturgies of popular culture performance by parents, teachers, clergy, everyone! This also implies that the grand reward for children is received from applause. One can preach about work being its own reward and the supreme values being the intrinsic ones, but children raised on transfusions of television are learning that genuine joy is derived only from a standing ovation.

The new joy, therefore, is often one of little more than heightened sensation. The new sensation, moreover, leads one to believe in the literalness of an altered state, albeit an externally generated one. To have one's state altered is, for some, to feel joy. At least it puts them on the road frequently travelled to finding joy. The opposite of joy?—"bummer." As Benny Parsons' language reminds us, something either joys us up or brings us down, be it an experience or pill. The brain, obviously, is involved, but it's not the cerebral cortex that has been called into action, but rather compartments far more primitive.

In this regard, society increasingly acts as if instincts by definition are meant to be honored. If constraint for Goethe was an art, it now has become a hang-up. Children are advised to "go with the flow," "let it all hang out," "go with their gut," and many are taking these admonitions to heart, as their communities seem to offer little or no constraint. The right to express oneself has become the byword of the day, even for small children demanding their rights.

In the end, the new joy, somewhat tribal in origin, clearly electronically generated, and aided and abetted by a cult of personality, the search for a new consciousness and altered states, the glory of public approval of popular performance, and the apotheosis of celebrity, will only grow in the present climate. These hardly are days of child protection, worship or even elemental appreciation. The new age relies on child exploitation and teaching forms of joy commensurate with this exploitation. That television host Fred Rogers would hit such a spectacular nerve when he announced to each child that he likes them exactly as they are bespeaks the danger in the new joy. But it also offers the hope that certain segments of the culture may regain those values required to nurture children.

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Applause is wonderful for the child. But only the child knows the degree to which it represents transitory compensation for things far more significant and healthy. "Joy," a grandmother living in Boston's Roxbury district told me years ago,

> "must be like electricity. The child must always be able to turn it on, or know they can get at it. All those rich folks," she continued, "who buy their little precious ones everything they want before they even know *what* they want, they aren't making electricity. That will never make for a joyous child. You watch those children and see just how long their smiles last. Believe me when I tell you, and I don't lie, those smiles of theirs aren't lasting anywhere near long enough."

IX

After lunch at 808 Langley Court with Lynn Swilling and her husband Jared, now unemployed for thirty months, I am about to take my leave. The halls outside have become peculiarly quiet for this time of day, the tray sliders having long ago disappeared, although I can still distinguish the sounds of at least four different television sets. The Swillings themselves habitually have two playing for almost the entire time they are awake.

From the single bedroom of this small but neatly kept apartment, seven year old Luanda Swilling appears. She has been sleeping and her face shows the familiar creases caused by her head having been buried in pillows. Seeing me she looks startled, for she is somewhat uncomfortable with visitors. Luanda has stayed home from school this morning with a head cold and it's clear from her sniffling and puffy eyes that she is in discomfort. "I can't breathe, Mommy," she says walking toward Lynn. "I can't breathe, Mommy."

In response, Lynn moves in the direction of the child as Jared rises from his chair in front of the window. Within moments, the child is being carried to the small table where our lunch dishes still sit, and is buried in her mother's body. Jared walks up behind his wife and gently begins stroking his daughter's hair. No one speaks as we listen to Luanda's sniffling and coughing.

Suddenly, this lovely child lifts her head and stares up at her mother and then beyond her mother's face at her father. Still sniffling, she looks at me and grins widely. Obviously contented and reassured, and, I remark to myself, joyous in the best of senses, she once again buries her head in her mother's arms and breasts.

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Lynn looks at me and giggles. What more is there to say to an aging psychologist speaking to families about children and joy! Jared, who has seemed especially low on this day, glances down at me as well and says softly, "That the sort of thing you looking for, Doc?"

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Maris A. Vinovskis

Early Childhood Education: Then and Now

HISTORICALLY AND CROSS CULTURALLY there is considerable variation in the ages at which children are sent to school. In the first half of the twentieth century in the United States, five or six was a common age for beginning formal schooling in kindergartens. But in the mid-1960s a new institution for helping poor and disadvantaged children was created, Head Start, which provided preschool training at ages three, four, or five and contributed to changing our attitudes toward young children and early childhood education.

Project Head Start is viewed by most scholars and policymakers as an unprecedented and highly successful effort to provide preschool training for disadvantaged Americans.[1] Its success and popularity are so great that many middle-class Americans now enroll their own children in preschool programs so that they will receive the same benefits of early education as their less fortunate counterparts. In 1989, nearly all children ages five or six were in school as well as 39.1 percent of those ages three and four.[2] Many educators argue that Head Start should be incorporated directly into the public schools so that all children receive early childhood education.

Yet is Head Start and early childhood schooling really as new and unprecedented as most of its proponents believe? Were there earlier efforts to enroll three or four year olds in schools? As this essay will show, Americans in the 1820s and 1830s, drawing upon the expe-

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riences of their European counterparts, created infant schools for educating poor children below the ages of five and six. Early childhood education spread rapidly throughout much of the United States and, in 1840, approximately 40 percent of all three year olds in Massachusetts were attending school. Yet, a reaction set in against early childhood education so that twenty years later there were few children under ages four or five in Massachusetts schools.

By comparing the development of infant schools in early nineteenth-century America with the creation and growth of Head Start after the mid-1960s, we will see how changing views of early childhood affects the likelihood of children attending schools. We will also see how early schooling frequently has been seen by policymakers as a means of eliminating crime and poverty among disadvantaged Americans. Moreover, by analyzing the initial enthusiasm for these schools for young children and then the subsequent disillusionment with these institutions, we can observe the tendency in our society to exaggerate the beneficial aspects of new programs and then to become discouraged when the actual results do not meet our unrealistic, initial expectations. While the infant schools of the early nineteenth century did not have a direct impact on Head Start, their rise and demise provides a useful perspective from which to assess our own changing views of early childhood education.

INFANT SCHOOLS

Societal views of children are not static. Phillippe Aries has argued that in the Middle Ages, childhood as a separate phase of development was not known. Instead, most children were perceived as "miniature adults," and young children received very little attention at all.[3]

The notion that colonial children were miniature adults has been accepted and used by many American historians, but there is considerable evidence to suggest otherwise.[4] The New England Puritans, for example, developed special catechisms for their children and generally made a distinction between children and adults. Their views of children, however, were not identical to those we hold today. Generally, they saw young children as more developed, capable, and responsible than we do today. As a result, they considered it natural to discuss topics such as religion and death with

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children under five and encouraged youngsters to learn to read at early ages.[5]

The Puritans also placed great emphasis on education. Everyone was expected to be able to read the Bible and therefore everyone had to be taught reading. Parents were given the primary responsibility for teaching their own children. The father initially was designated as the person to be entrusted with educating the children and household servants because education was seen as intimately tied to religious instruction. However, as most second-generation males chose not to become full members of the church, the Puritans reluctantly turned to mothers to teach and catechize their children.[6]

Schools were established in colonial New England from the very beginning, but most of them were grammar schools or universities for training future clergymen. Some parents did send their youngest children to private dame schools, schools run by women in their homes, to learn the rudiments of reading, and in the second half of the eighteenth century, towns gradually established public primary schools. By the early nineteenth century, Massachusetts had an extensive and well-developed system of public primary schools for most children while other states such as New York and Pennsylvania were still struggling to establish public or private schools for all children.[7]

Concerns about poverty and crime in the growing urban centers such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia stimulated reformers to look for ways of reducing or eradicating these problems. Increasingly, reformers turned to education as a means of preventing crime and eliminating poverty.[8] Lancasterian monitorial schools were established to teach large numbers of ignorant poor children in these urban areas.[9] Similarly, Sunday schools were created to provide moral training and literacy to children and adults who needed such assistance.[10] Both the Lancasterian schools and the Sunday schools were first developed in Great Britain and then imported into the United States—a very common sequence of events for many early nineteenth-century reforms.

At the same time that Europeans developed monitorial and Sunday schools to help the poor, they also experimented with infant schools designed to help children under the ages of five or six. Robert Owen, one of the leading reformers in Great Britain, developed a plan for educating the very young children of parents who worked at his industrial plant in New Lanark, Scotland. Owen believed that the early influences on children were crucial and he was concerned that

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unattended children were misled by the bad examples of their peers in the city streets or on the local playgrounds. Owen, like many other reformers, also thought that the influences of poor parents on their offspring often were not positive and that society benefited by having someone else provide these children with middle-class moral and character training. Moreover, Owen saw early childhood schooling as a means of freeing poor mothers to support their families by being able to work outside the home.[11]

Owen's ideas about infant schools were enthusiastically endorsed by other British reformers who were also concerned with the spread of vice and poverty—especially in London. Philanthropists provided money for the creation of infant schools under the leadership of educators such as Samuel Wilderspin. Most of these infant schools employed the Lancasterian method which permitted one teacher to educate one hundred to two hundred infants. While some of these infant schools mainly focused on moral and character building, others emphasized reading and the teaching of the alphabet. Poor parents in particular often insisted that their children receive education in reading rather than just being provided with moral training.[12]

Information about the British infant schools spread quickly to the United States. John Griscom, an American educator and chemist, published in 1823 a two-volume account of his recent travels in Europe in which he strongly praised Owen's education of infants at New Lanark. Two years later, Griscom opened a monitorial high school in New York City which included the first infant school in America as part of his introductory department.[13] New York Governor De Witt Clinton took up the cause of infant schools and urged their establishment under private sponsorship as a means of allowing poor mothers to earn a living while ensuring that their young children received proper moral and character training.[14] Other influential supporters of infant schools in New York City, such as Joanna Bethune, stressed the religious potential of these institutions more than their value for alleviating poverty or preventing future crimes.[15]

Infant schools were also set up in other large cities. Philadelphia developed the most extensive infant school system under the auspices of three different groups: the Infant School Society of Philadelphia (City Society), the Infant School Society of the Northern Liberties and Kensington (NLK), and the Infant School Society of Southwark (Southwark Society).[16] Comparable infant schools were set up in

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1828 in Boston under the Infant School Society of the City of Boston as well as under the sponsorship of a rival group supported by the Unitarians.[17] Although infant schools in the United States tended to be concentrated in the larger urban centers along the eastern seaboard like Boston, New York City, and Philadelphia, some were established in smaller communities such as Franklin, Tennessee and Hartford, Connecticut.

The reasons for the establishment of infant schools in the United States in the late 1820s and early 1830s varied considerably. Most of the proponents were eager to provide early education for the children of the poor. Their rationale was both to relieve the poor mother of child care so that she could earn a living and to provide proper socialization for her children that middle-class reformers feared were being brought up without proper moral guidance. Some reformers also believed that infant schools would help prepare children from disadvantaged homes to do better in the regular public schools. A few, like William Russell who edited the influential *American Journal of Education,* saw in infant schools an opportunity to reform early education altogether by introducing more effective, Pestalozzian methods of teaching into the public schools.[18]

Whereas in Great Britain the infant school proponents were particularly concerned about the increasing crime rate, in the United States the infant school supporters were more interested in reducing poverty and welfare costs. While most American reformers in the 1820s and 1830s did not see urban problems in this country as severe or as threatening as in Great Britain, they feared that unless immediate, corrective steps were now undertaken, the quality of life in American cities would rapidly deteriorate. Moreover, most reformers in both the United States and Great Britain were optimistic that early childhood training would radically alter and improve future society. As the Infant School Society of the City of Boston enthusiastically proclaimed: "But a ray of millennial light has shone on us, and reveals a way in which poverty, with all its attendant evils—moral, physical, and intellectual, may be banished from the world."[19]

Infant schools in the United States initially were set up as separate institutions apart from the emerging public school systems in northern cities. Almost from the very beginning, proponents of the infant schools tried to persuade education officials to incorporate these institutions into their regular public schools. They hoped that by

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financing infant schools with public tax dollars, these new institutions would become available to everyone.

Urban public schools were slow in accepting infant schools into their systems. While educators in New York City and Philadelphia praised the infant schools, they were hesitant to incorporate them into the public schools. They feared that the high cost of supporting the infant schools would be at the expense of their efforts to expand the existing public schools for older children. Some also believed that the best means of providing such early education was through an independent infant school system rather than attaching it to the more rigid and traditional public school system. After considerable discussion and experimentation, infant schools were added to both the New York City and Philadelphia public schools in the early 1830s.[20]

The situation in Boston was different. There the public primary schools were well-established and classrooms were run very differently than in the infant schools. While infant schools tended to emphasize a close, affectionate relationship between the pupils and the teachers and downplayed intellectual pursuits, the Boston primary schools still emphasized rote memorization and demanded strict classroom discipline. After asking Boston teachers about the success of former infant school students in the public schools, the Boston Primary School Committee decided that infant education taught children bad habits and therefore refused to incorporate infant schools into the existing public school system.[21]

Educators and the public were split on what should be taught in infant schools. Some infant school teachers stressed play and deemphasized intellectual pursuits while others immediately tried to teach the alphabet and reading. Often it was the parents who insisted that infant schools stress rigid classroom discipline and teach their children how to read. Indeed, many infant school instructors who opposed teaching two and three year olds how to read were forced to do so under pressure from the parents. As we shall see, this debate over how very young children should be educated came to play an important role in the eventual demise of the infant schools.

Although infant schools originally were intended to help disadvantaged youngsters, soon there were calls for comparable institutions for children of the middle and upper classes. As the *Ladies' Magazine* observed in 1829:

> The interesting subject of Infant Schools is becoming more and more fashionable. . . . We have been told that it is now in contemplation, to

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> open a school for the infants besides the poor. If such course be not soon adopted, at the age for entering primary schools those *poor* children will assuredly be the richest *scholars*. And why should a plan which promises so many advantages, independent of merely relieving the mother from her charge, be confined to children of the indigent?[22]

Some schools for the children of wealthier parents were created in the late 1820s and early 1830s, but most infant schools remained dedicated to helping children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The influence of infant schools went well beyond the immediate confines of those institutions. Although young children in colonial America sometimes had been sent to private dame schools for their education, it is unlikely that very large numbers of two or three year olds ever attended such institutions. However, it does appear that the stress on early childhood education by the proponents of infant schools in the 1820s and 1830s may have encouraged more parents to send their children at earlier ages even to the public primary schools. It is estimated that in 1840 approximately 40 percent of all three year olds in Massachusetts were enrolled in school—the vast majority of whom attended a regular public school rather than a special infant school.[23]

Strong negative reactions against the infant schools, however, led to their eventual demise. The attacks on early childhood schooling came from three major directions: the growing belief that young children should be educated at home; the stress on the need for balanced physical and mental development; and the efforts of the public school systems to eliminate very young children from their classrooms.

Infant school advocates from the very beginning were placed in an awkward situation with regard to explaining why young children should be removed from their families and the care of their mothers in order to be sent to an infant school. In the case of poor and immigrant families, the reformers usually portrayed the infant school as a substitute for unsatisfactory parents and an inadequate home environment. As efforts were made to attract children of middle-class families, the rationale for infant schools was broadened by stressing the similarities between these institutions and the home. While there was considerable discussion about the relationship between the infant schools and the role of the family, the issue was never satisfactorily resolved and many middle-class parents removed their young children during the 1830s and 1840s.[24]

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The second and probably most important factor is that with the demise of the infant schools, there was the growing belief that a child's mental and physical development had to occur simultaneously and therefore, children should not be intellectually overstimulated. Even during the 1820s there were calls for a more balanced and gradual education of young children with particular emphasis on cultivating their physical development. But the fear of damaging young children by early excessive intellectual training was put forth most forcibly and effectively by a prominent and well-respected young Connecticut physician, Amariah Brigham, in his popular book, *Remarks on the Influence of Mental Excitement upon Health*:

> Many physicians of great experience are of the opinion, that efforts to develope [sic] the minds of young children are very frequently injurious; and from instances of disease in children which I have witnessed, I am forced to believe that the danger is indeed great, and that very often in attempting to call forth and cultivate the intellectual faculties of children before they are six or seven years of age, serious and lasting injury has been done to both the body and the mind. . . .
>
> I beseech parents, therefore, to pause before they attempt to make prodigies of their own children. Though they may not destroy them by the measures they adopt to effect this purpose, yet they will surely enfeeble their bodies, and greatly dispose them to nervous affections. Early mental excitement will serve only to bring forth beautiful, but premature flowers, which are destined soon to wither away, without producing fruit.[25]

Brigham's book, which went into four editions in the United States, was widely and favorably reviewed in popular and scholarly journals. Educators and authors of popular child-rearing advice books now reversed themselves and opposed early childhood schooling. Many of the middle-class women who had created and financed the private infant schools withdrew their assistance. Although some of the proponents of the infant schools still tried to rally support for them by arguing that their institutions never really had intended to stress intellectual activities, the growing hostility to early childhood education could not be overcome.[26]

As we have already seen, infant schools received a mixed reaction from public school officials and teachers. While some were sympathetic to the goals and practices of the infant schools, others saw them either as subversive to good order in the schools or as institutions that

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diverted funds which could be better spent on providing public schooling for older children. As the popular and scientific attacks on infant schools mounted in the 1830s, public school officials and teachers joined the effort to eliminate young children from the classroom as they regarded these pupils as disruptive and difficult to manage.[27]

The attacks on early childhood schooling were successful and almost all of the infant schools were closed. Moreover, while many young children earlier had been enrolled in the public schools, few were sent or allowed to attend in the 1840s and 1850s. In Massachusetts, for example, the percentage of children under four years old in schools declined from 10.5 percent in 1839–1840 to 3.7 percent in 1848–1849—the last year for which data for that age-group was gathered. The elimination of young children from the schools continued as the percentage of Massachusetts children under five years old in schools declined from 15.6 percent in 1849–1850 to 0.6 percent in 1888–1889. By 1900, however, there was a slight reversal as the percentage of children under five years old in schools rose to 3.5 percent because of the expansion of the kindergarten system in the Commonwealth.[28]

Not only were infant schools abandoned and early schooling denounced in the decades prior to the Civil War, they were also soon forgotten. When kindergartens were introduced in Massachusetts in the 1860s, most of them did not accept three or four year old children. Moreover, kindergartens stressed the gradual development of the child and used games and objects rather than letters to teach children. Interestingly, although Elizabeth Peabody, a former infant school teacher in the 1820s and 1830s, is credited with establishing the first kindergarten in Massachusetts, she downplayed any comparisons between the two institutions in order not to taint the new kindergartens with the public hostility that had developed against the infant schools.[29]

HEAD START

There were relatively few efforts to provide preschool training during the first half of the twentieth century. A few day-care centers or nurseries were set up in the early twentieth century, but most of them did not survive the 1920s. The economic crisis of the Great Depression led to the expansion of nursery schools under the Work

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Progress Administration (WPA) in the 1930s, but the number of nursery schools declined as the economy recovered and federal assistance was withdrawn. The interest in nursery schools received a significant boost during World War II when the Congress passed the Community Facilities Act (the Lanham Act) in 1941 which allowed child-care centers to be federally funded in war-impacted areas. Although there is considerable disagreement on the number of children who attended these centers, ranging from about 100,000 to 1,500,000, the program was quickly terminated in most states after the war. As a result, during the 1950s and early 1960s, policymakers and the general public paid relatively little attention to preschool education.[30]

While general interest in preschool education was low in the 1950s and early 1960s, experimental programs in several cities, such as Baltimore, Nashville, New York, and Syracuse, tried to enrich the intellectual experiences of disadvantaged children.[31] Moreover, scholars such as Benjamin Bloom and J. McVicker Hunt in the early 1960s argued that children's intelligence could be significantly altered by environmental changes and that early childhood education was a key to improving later performance in the schools. Bloom's notion that the first five years of life was the "critical period" for a child's intellectual development became widely accepted among experts in child development and provided much of the scientific justification for the Head Start Program.[32]

At the same time that some scholars and a few programs saw the value of early childhood education, Americans rediscovered poverty in this country. Following the upswing in political support for the Democrats after the assassination of President John Kennedy and under the skillful political leadership of President Lyndon Johnson, a nationwide crusade against poverty was launched.[33] Although early childhood training was not immediately seen as an essential component of the War on Poverty, the Johnson Administration assigned an important role for education in helping disadvantaged Americans break out of the cycle of poverty.[34]

Sargent Shriver, the Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), and his advisors are credited with the development of the Head Start Program. Their enthusiasm for early childhood education was based in large part on their prior experiences with the President's Panel on Mental Retardation in 1962 which had called for the widespread establishment of nursery centers in disadvantaged areas.

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The Panel claimed that compensatory education could reduce mental retardation by 50 percent.[35]

Although early childhood training was not a focal point of OEO's initial activities in its efforts to eliminate poverty, Shriver quickly saw its potential both to reduce poverty as well as to help his politically troubled agency. Drawing upon many of the same individuals who had earlier served on the President's Panel on Mental Retardation, he created a Planning Committee of child-development experts under the leadership of Dr. Robert Cook. Ignoring the objections of several members of the Planning Committee, Shriver decided to go ahead with a rapid expansion of the new program in the summer of 1965 and provided services for over 500,000 children despite the lack of planning and preparation for an undertaking of this magnitude.

Initially the Head Start Program was an eight-week summer program for disadvantaged children ages three through five (serving mainly four and five year olds). The next year Head Start services were also offered on a year-round basis and, after 1969, an effort was made to convert the summer programs into all-year programs. By 1972 almost all Head Start programs were year-round. While most Head Start programs remained essentially the same in organization and orientation, there were periodic experimental efforts to broaden their scope and alter their emphasis. The Follow Through Program was created in 1967 to provide special services to Head Start children when they entered kindergarten and elementary schools. That same year demonstration Parent and Child Centers were set up to offer Head Start services to families with children under the age of three. In 1971, a demonstration Health Start Program was set up to provide medical and dental services and health education to Head Start and other children from low-income families. A special program for handicapped children was established in 1972 which mandated that at least 10 percent of Head Start enrollees be handicapped children. At the same time, Home Start was created as a three-year demonstration program to provide Head Start services to children and parents in their own homes.[36]

From the very beginning, the Head Start Planning Committee envisioned the program providing a wide variety of services to children including educational, health, nutrition, social, and psychological assistance. Although cognitive development was seen as part of the educational training for preschool children, it was not overemphasized at the expense of the other services. Indeed, the Planning

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Committee and many Head Start proponents were hostile to the Office of Education and wanted to minimize the direct educational component of these programs.[37]

Nevertheless, most policymakers and the media were quick to stress the success of Head Start in increasing significantly the IQ of at-risk children. Even Sargent Shriver, who understood and advocated the broad nature of the program, frequently emphasized the large and immediate cognitive gains for children attending the Head Start summer programs. Before the US House of Representatives in 1966, he testified that:

> The gains measured by formal testing show that significant improvement was obtained in a relatively short period of time.
>
> Dr. Leon Eisenberg, who is a professor of child psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University, evaluated the Headstart program in Baltimore. . . . [H]e found that on a group of about 400 poor children in Headstart, there was a measurable increase in the intelligence quotient according to a standard mental abilities test of between 8 1/2 and 10 points, on the average.
>
> . . . We have yet, in our outfit, at any rate, to receive the first report claiming that Headstart failed to produce measurable gains, in the readiness of the youngsters, the readiness for intellectual work of the youngsters who were enrolled.[38]

As a result, the public and most decisionmakers believed that increasing the IQ of young, disadvantaged children was an important, if not the primary goal of Head Start programs.

Head Start was clearly intended for disadvantaged children. Special efforts were made to target the three hundred poorest counties in the United States for setting up Head Start programs and 90 percent of the children enrolled had to meet the poverty guidelines set up for the program. While the number of at-risk children served by Head Start grew rapidly, the limited funding meant that many others still could not participate.

While not many children from more advantaged backgrounds ever enrolled in Head Start, their parents sought comparable programs for them elsewhere. Middle-class interest in early education in part was stimulated by the apparent success of Head Start programs for disadvantaged children as well as by the need for more day care as the number of married women with young children in the labor force rose rapidly. For example, kindergartens now became almost universally attended as the percentage of all five year

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old children attending them grew from 59.5 percent in 1965 to 79.5 percent in 1990.[39]

Another important feature of Head Start programs was the involvement of parents. Rather than seeking to separate children from their parents, Head Start programs fostered parental involvement. To be sure, some of this was intended as a means of reaching the parents and helping them to improve their own lives as well. But parents of Head Start children were also encouraged to obtain training in order to qualify for the paid staff positions in the local programs. Remarkably, about 70 percent of the teaching staff were from low-income families.[40]

One of the things that made Head Start so attractive to parents and local communities was that the federal government covered most of the costs. Up to 90 percent of the total cost of Head Start was paid by the federal government—just the opposite of regular elementary and secondary school programs which were funded mainly by the local and state governments.[41] As a result, educators and parents could argue for the expansion of Head Start in their communities without feeling that they were taking funds from their own local schools.

Finally, Head Start programs were portrayed to policymakers and the public in the most glowing terms. While some of the scholars involved in this undertaking realized the limitations of the programs, the rhetoric on their behalf was extravagant and exaggerated. Head Start would significantly increase the IQ of disadvantaged children and eliminate poverty in the future.

Head Start suffered a major, though not fatal, setback in 1969 with the publication of the Westinghouse report, an evaluation of Head Start by the Westinghouse Learning Corporation and Ohio University.[42] The Westinghouse report stated that while Head Start did increase temporarily the IQ scores of its participants, that gain was quickly lost once the children entered the regular schools. The *New York Times* ran a front-page headline which announced that "Head Start Pupils Found No Better Off Than Others."[43] As a result, Head Start did not appear to provide disadvantaged children with the cognitive assistance they needed for success in schools.

The reactions to the Westinghouse report were varied. Some critics of Head Start saw the report as vindicating their earlier questions about the efficacy of this program and called for an elimination or at least a scaling back of the program. Others questioned the accuracy of the Westinghouse report and pointed out that the purpose of the

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Head Start Program was never focused solely, or even mainly, on cognitive gains for children.

When the news of the Westinghouse report first came to President Nixon's attention, Nixon, whose administration had been considering a major expansion of the Head Start Program, continued his commitment to early childhood education, but called Head Start "experimental" and moved the program from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the newly created Office of Child Development in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.[44]

Efforts to dismantle Head Start failed, however, because its popularity among the poor and in Congress was sufficient to protect it. Nevertheless, while Head Start had grown rapidly during the 1960s, it barely maintained its budget levels during the 1970s—especially after President Nixon vetoed further federal funding and involvement in day care.[45]

During the 1980s, there was a revival of interest and support for early childhood education. As some child developmentalists argued that it was essential to reach children before the age of three, pressure mounted to help at-risk children even earlier. Moreover, as the proportion of mothers with young children in the labor force rose, the need for placing even younger children in day-care facilities also increased. Although there is a heated debate over the effects of day care on infants, a consensus seems to be emerging that quality day care is not detrimental to older children and may even be beneficial for disadvantaged children.[46] Moreover, the highly publicized, but controversial longitudinal results of the Perry Preschool Program in Michigan are frequently cited as scientific proof of the benefits of early childhood education and have contributed to the increasing efforts in many localities to provide such services for all children.[47]

As the enthusiasm for earlier and more universal preschool education grows, the scholarly reviews of the beneficial impact of early childhood training remain much more cautious and reserved. While high quality efforts such as the Perry Preschool Program may have significant long-term benefits for its recipients, the results from those unusual programs cannot be applied directly to the Head Start programs where the evaluations of the benefits are less clear-cut.[48] Ron Haskins, a developmental psychologist and staff member of the Committee on Ways and Means of the US House of Representatives, recently reviewed the existing studies and concluded that:

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1) Both model programs and Head Start produce significant and meaningful gains in intellectual performance and socioemotional development by the end of a year of intervention.

2) For both types of programs, gains on standardized IQ and achievement tests as well as on tests of socioemotional development decline within a few years (or even less in the case of Head Start studies).

3) On categorical variables of school performance such as special education placement and grade retention, there is very strong evidence of positive effects for the model programs and modest evidence of effects for Head Start programs.

4) On measures of life success such as teen pregnancy, delinquency, welfare participation, and employment, there is modest evidence of positive impacts for model programs but virtually no evidence for Head Start.[49]

Changes in scholarly views of early child development, which may have a bearing on how young children are educated, have not received much explicit attention in the debates about Head Start. In the 1960s and 1970s, many child developmentalists believed that the first three to five years of life were crucial in determining the long-term cognitive and affective growth of the child.[50] More recent work in life-span psychology and life course analysis, however, argues that while early development is important, it is by no means determinative and that significant changes can and do occur at older ages.[51] As a result, it is not clear that early childhood is the only or the best time for helping children at-risk.[52] One might, for example, devote more attention to assisting disadvantaged children in the elementary grades. While such efforts have been made in the past, the benefits and costs of such an approach have not been systematically compared to those from Head Start and other early childhood education interventions.[53]

If some in the scholarly community have reservations about the long-term efficacy of Head Start, other academics and most of the public and policymakers are convinced of its success and value. Many now argue that Head Start programs should be made available to all children, including middle-class children, by incorporating them into the regular public schools. But opponents counter that there is no reason to believe that Head Start is necessary or even effective for nondisadvantaged children and that making these programs a part of

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the regular schools would destroy the very characteristics of these programs which had been so important in the first place.[54]

Despite the continued relative lack of rigorous scientific evidence about the long-term efficacy of Head Start, twenty-five years after its establishment, there is almost overwhelming bipartisan political support for its expansion. Both President Bush and the Congress are committed to providing Head Start services for all at-risk children who need them. Following the 1989 Education Summit Conference at Charlottesville, Virginia, the Bush Administration and the state governors announced that "by the year 2000 all children in America will start school ready to learn."[55] While only an estimated 28.3 percent of eligible three year olds and 44.1 percent of eligible four year olds are currently participating in Head Start, those figures are expected to rise dramatically as both the Administration and the Congress provide more funding for that program in the near future.[56] Indeed, the Bush Administration has just called for an increase of $600 million for Head Start—the largest increase in the program's history.[57]

CONCLUSION

This brief discussion of the infant education movement of the 1820s and 1830s and the Head Start Program of the 1960s suggests some interesting similarities and differences between the two efforts. During the current debates over the wisdom or the appropriateness of placing children in nursery or day-care facilities, most observers assume that this is a new and unprecedented development. Our analysis, however, suggests that Americans more than 150 years ago in some states placed almost 40 percent of their three year olds in school. Interestingly, during both periods there was a tension between the belief that the proper place for a young child was in the home and the desire to put the child into a special institution to spur his or her intellectual and social development.

It also reminds us that adult perceptions of three and four year old children are not fixed and have varied historically. While early nineteenth-century Americans believed that one could and should educate very young children to read, there was growing hostility after the mid-1830s toward any early intellectual stimulation of children. Similarly, while a few educators or policymakers in the 1950s or early 1960s called for early childhood training, after the development

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and popularization of the Head Start Program there was growing pressure to provide early education not only for disadvantaged children but also for those from middle-class families. Compared to thirty years ago, popular and scientific views of three and four year olds see children in this age-group as more intellectually and emotionally developed.

Although the broad changes in public perceptions of three and four year old children were affected by many factors, medical and academic experts played an important role in both periods in shaping our views of the nature of early childhood and of the appropriate institutional and educational interventions for helping at-risk children to develop properly. The best scientific information of the time was sought and utilized. In neither period was academic knowledge of childhood by itself determinative of how young children were viewed and in neither period did it ever conclusively establish the relationship between early childhood education and subsequent success in school.

Concerns about providing the best settings for young children to develop were a consideration in the both the 1820s and 1960s, but the initial popularity of these early childhood education movements stemmed from efforts to eradicate poverty in America. Rather than focusing on structural changes in the American society or economy to reduce poverty levels, reformers in both periods often displayed a naïve and overwhelmingly optimistic belief that poverty could be greatly minimized if not entirely eliminated through early childhood education. While both movements for early childhood education grew out of a genuine desire to help at-risk children compete more effectively with their more privileged counterparts, once middle-class parents in the 1820s and 1830s realized the potential value of early childhood training, they demanded comparable opportunities for their own children—in part because of a fear that the disadvantaged children might actually do better than their own offspring. On the other hand, while middle-class parents today have also sought early schooling for their children, they appear to be less worried that disadvantaged children might actually outperform their own offspring in school.

The initial enthusiasm for infant schools and Head Start frequently led to unrealistic claims for the impact of these movements on children and on society. This was fostered in part by the need to convince the public and policymakers to invest in this particular new undertaking rather than in some other project, which also

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promised to make dramatic improvements. One of the characteristics of our society is the perceived need to exaggerate the benefits of any reform in order to compete successfully with other proposals for scarce public funds and attention. As the overly optimistic claims for the success of the programs are unfulfilled, the public and policymakers become disillusioned and often drop their support for these efforts. In the case of infant schools, the disillusionment, spurred by the fears of actually damaging young children rather than helping them, led to the demise of those institutions. With Head Start, however, the disappointment over the long-term intellectual gains was cushioned by the strong political support that the programs had generated and contributed to its survival. What is unusual about Head Start is that recent political and social developments have revived interest in the program and have led to its rapid expansion at a time when most other domestic federal programs are languishing.

While the initial efforts to help young children usually were seen in broad developmental terms, there was considerable pressure from parents and policymakers in both periods to stress the intellectual benefits of early training. As a result, both the infant school movement and Head Start became quickly identified with helping children to learn to read. When the reaction against early intellectual training came in the mid-1830s, the infant school movement was destroyed even though some of its early proponents had argued that cognitive development had never been a major goal of their programs. Similarly, the initial disappointing evaluation findings about the lack of any long-term IQ gains for disadvantaged children in Head Start almost led to its demise even though its supporters also pointed to the other positive aspects of that program, such as providing health care for young children.

There were considerable differences in how the parents of the disadvantaged children were perceived and treated by the advocates of these two movements. In the infant school movement, most of the reformers distrusted the parents of the children and set up these institutions as a way of overcoming what they regarded as the inadequate home environment. The parents of these children were regarded as morally flawed and incapable of properly raising their children. While the poor parents were expected to contribute financially, if they could afford it, to the costs of the infant schools, they were not given a prominent role in the running of infant schools. Early nineteenth-century reformers, however, viewed the infant

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schools as a way of reaching the poor parents in order to reform them.

On the other hand, Project Head Start perceived and treated the parents much better. Although the children were seen as coming from disadvantaged and culturally impoverished backgrounds, most Head Start proponents did not see the parents as morally inadequate or flawed. Parents were encouraged to play an important role in the administration of the programs and many were given training so that they could staff the programs themselves. While the infant school movement unashamedly sought to replicate Protestant, white, middle-class values, the Head Start Program genuinely has tried to be more pluralist and multicultural.

The ideas for the infant schools were borrowed from abroad and American educators drew upon the experiences of their British colleagues for guidance. In general, American reform efforts in the nineteenth century were much more internationally oriented than those today. For example, Head Start was almost entirely based upon the ideas and direction of American scholars and policymakers with relatively little attention to any preschool activities elsewhere. Indeed, the flow of information was reversed with the British later modifying their own preschool programs on the basis of Project Head Start. Only belatedly are most American scholars and policymakers today inquiring about how young children in other countries are raised and educated.

Finally, both the infant school movement and Project Head Start have relied upon a fairly narrow test of their usefulness in helping disadvantaged children. Proponents of both efforts have argued that young children who attend these preschool institutions have done better than those who have not. What has rarely been considered, however, is whether some of the money and effort spent on early childhood training might be equally or more effectively used to improve the education of older children through the lengthening of the school year or the provision of special individual tutoring.

Part of the reason for the focus on early childhood education in both the 1820s and 1960s was because educators and scholars convinced parents and policymakers that the development of the child in the first three to five years irrevocably affected their subsequent development. Yet more recent work in life-span and life course analyses suggests that while early child development is indeed important, it may not be as determinative or final as either the proponents of the infant schools or Head Start initially believed.

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Perhaps it is time to reconsider once again what are the relative merits and costs of providing preschool education compared to other compensatory efforts in helping children in the elementary grades or in the junior high schools. This is not to say that early childhood education in general and Head Start in particular are not important and useful. They probably are, but the research basis on the long-term effects of those programs still remains relatively limited and incomplete. Therefore, as our popular and scientific views of young children and their subsequent development change, we must continually be prepared to reexamine the institutions we have designed to foster their cognitive and affective growth.

ENDNOTES

[1]For example, see the essays in Sharon L. Kagan and Edward F. Zigler, eds., *Early Schooling: The National Debate* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987); and Edward Zigler and Jeanette Valentine, eds., *Project Head Start: A Legacy of the War on Poverty* (New York: Free Press, 1979).

[2]US Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1991,* 111th ed. (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1991), table 222.

[3]Phillippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life,* trans. by Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962).

[4]For historians who continue to see colonial children as "miniature adults," see John Demos, "The American Family in Past Time," *American Scholar* 43 (1974): 422–46; John Modell and Madeline Goodman, "Historical Perspectives," in S. Shirley Feldman and Glen R. Elliott, eds., *At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), 93–122; Walter I. Trattner, *From Poor Law to Welfare State: A History of Social Welfare in America,* 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 1989); and Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970).

[5]Ross W. Beales, Jr., "In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial America," *American Quarterly* 27 (1975): 379–98; Carl F. Kaestle and Maris A. Vinovskis, "From Apron Strings to ABCs: Parents, Children, and Schooling in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts," in John Demos and S. S. Boocock, eds., *Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), S539–S580; Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Religion, Family, and the Life Course: Explorations in the Social History of Early America* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1992); and David Stannard, "Death and the Puritan Child," in David Stannard, ed., *Death in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 9–29.

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[7]Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780–1860* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983); and Lee Soltow and Edward Stevens, *The Rise of Literacy and the Common School in the United States: A Socio-Economic Analysis to 1870* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

[8]Maris A. Vinovskis, "Schooling and Poor Children in 19th-Century America," *American Behavioral Scientist* 35 (3) (January/February 1992): 313–31.

[9]Carl F. Kaestle, ed., *Joseph Lancaster and the Monitorial School Movement: A Documentary History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1973).

[10]Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790–1880* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988).

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[12]Phillip McCann and Francis A. Young, *Samuel Wilderspin and the Infant School Movement* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

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[14]De Witt Clinton, "Annual Message," in *Messages from the Governors* (Albany, N.Y.: J. B. Lyon, 1909), 3, 114–15.

[15]George W. Bethune, *Memoirs of Mrs. Joanna Bethune* (New York: Harper and Row, 1864).

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[17]Dean May and Maris A. Vinovskis, "A Ray of Millenial Light: Early Education and Social Reform in the Infant School Movement in Massachusetts, 1826–1840," in Tamara K. Hareven, ed., *Family and Kin in American Urban Communities, 1800–1940* (New York: Watts, 1977), 62–99.

[18]Jenkins, "Infant Schools and the Development of Public Primary Schools"; Carl F. Kaestle and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); May and Vinovskis, "A Ray of Millenial Light"; and Alan R. Pence, "Infant Schools in North America, 1825–1840," in *Advances in Early Education and Day Care* (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1986), 1–25.

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[20]Jenkins, "Infant Schools and the Development of Public Primary Schools."

[21]May and Vinovskis, "A Ray of Millenial Light"; and Kaestle and Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts.*

[22]*Ladies' Magazine,* February 1829.

[23]Kaestle and Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts.*

[24]Ibid.

[25]Amariah Brigham, *Remarks on the Influence of Mental Cultivation and Mental Excitement upon Health,* 2nd ed. (Boston: Marsh, Capen and Lyon, 1833), 15, 55.

[26]May and Vinovskis, "A Ray of Millenial Light."

[27]Kaestle and Vinovskis, *Education and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts.*

[28]Ibid., 248–49.

[29]For a discussion of how the kindergarten movement dealt with the concern about the overstimulation of the minds of young children, see Caroline Winterer, "Avoiding a 'Hothouse System of Education': Kindergartens and the Problem of Insanity, 1860–1890," *History of Education Quarterly* (forthcoming).

[30]Judith D. Auerbach, *In the Business of Child Care: Employer Initiatives and Working Women* (New York: Praeger, 1988); Victoria L. Getis and Maris A. Vinovskis, "History of Child Care in the United States Before 1950," in Michael E. Lamb, Kathleen J. Sternberg, Carl-Philip Hwang, and Anders G. Broberg, eds., *Child Care in Context: Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992), 185–206; and Margaret O'Brien Steinfels, *Who's Minding the Children? The History and Politics of Day Care in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973).

[31]Edward Zigler and Karen Anderson, "An Idea Whose Time Had Come: The Intellectual and Political Climate for Head Start," in Edward Zigler and Jeanette Valentine, eds., *Project Head Start: A Legacy of the War on Poverty* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 3–19.

[32]Benjamin S. Bloom, *Stability and Change in Human Characteristics* (New York: John Wiley, 1964); and J. McVicker Hunt, *Intelligence and Experience* (New York: Ronald Press, 1961). There was also a great increase in the 1960s in the proportion of child-rearing articles about the intellectual development of children in popular magazines. Julia Wrigley, "Do Young Children Need Intellectual Stimulation? Experts' Advice to Parents, 1900–1985," *History of Education Quarterly* 29 (1) (1989): 41–75.

[33]Edward D. Berkowitz, *America's Welfare State: From Roosevelt to Reagan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); and Marshall Kaplan and

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Peggy Cucit, eds., *The Great Society and Its Legacy: Twenty Years of U.S. Social Policy* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1986).

[34]Hugh Davis Graham, *The Uncertain Triumph: Federal Education Policy in the Kennedy and Johnson Years* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); and Harold Silver and Pamela Silver, *An Educational War on Poverty: American and British Policy-Making, 1960–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[35]For a useful, but somewhat too laudatory, examination of the origins and development of Head Start, see Zigler and Valentine, eds., *Project Head Start.*

[36]Gilbert Y. Steiner, *The Children's Cause* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1976); and Zigler and Valentine, eds., *Project Head Start.* For an analysis of the Follow Through Program, see Eugene A. Ramp and Colleen Smalter Pederson, eds., *Follow Through: Program and Policy Issues* (Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education, forthcoming).

[37]One important political advantage of not defining Project Head Start as part of federal educational programs was that it allowed the funding of religious groups without becoming mired in the split over federal funding of Catholic schools that plagued most educational programs in the early 1960s.

[38]Testimony of Sargent Shriver, US Congress, House, Committee on Education and Labor, 89th Cong., 2nd Sess., *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on the War on Poverty Program,* 8 March 1966, 186.

[39]National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics, 1991* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1991), Table 45. There was also an increase in the proportion of kindergartens which were open for the entire day as opposed to only the mornings or the afternoons.

[40]Peter Skerry, "The Charmed Life of Head Start," *Public Interest* 73 (1983): 18–39.

[41]Today grantees must contribute 20 percent of the total cost of the program from nonfederal sources.

[42]Westinghouse Learning Corporation, *The Impact of Head Start: An Evaluation of the Effects of Head Start on Children's Cognitive and Affective Development. Executive Summary,* Ohio University Report to the Office of Economic Opportunity, ED036321 (Washington, D.C.: Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information, June 1969).

[43]The article did mention that the programs might have a beneficial impact on the health and physical well-being of the children, but it downplayed the importance of this line of reasoning. *New York Times,* 14 April 1969.

[44]President Nixon's speech on poverty delivered on 19 February 1969, *Almanac, 91st Congress, 1st Session. . . 1969* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1970), 33-A. Nixon had endorsed Head Start during the presidential campaign of 1968. Rather than trying to eliminate Head Start by mentioning the results of the forthcoming Westinghouse report, Nixon was attempting to deflect the anticipated criticism. Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Politics of a Guaranteed Income: The*

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Nixon Administration and the Family Assistance Plan (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 150.

[45]Steiner, *The Children's Cause.*

[46]For a discussion of what we know about the impact of infant day-care programs, see K. Alison Clarke-Stewart, "Infant Day Care: Maligned or Malignant?" *American Psychologist* 44 (2) (February 1989): 266–73.

[47]Lawrence J. Schweinhart and David P. Weikart, *Young Children Grow Up: The Effects of the Perry Preschool Program on Youths Through Age 15,* Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, No. 7 (Ypsilanti, Mich.: High/Scope Press, 1980); and John R. Berrueta-Clement et al., *Changed Lives: The Effects of the Perry Preschool Programs on Youths Through Age 19,* Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, No. 8 (Ypsilanti, Mich.: High/Scope Press, 1984).

[48]The analysis of the Perry Preschool Program has been criticized for the significant differences between the control and the intervention groups, the lack of total random assignment to the two groups, and the method of estimating the cost-benefits of the program. In addition, given the high quality of the Perry Preschool Program, it certainly is not representative of the type of care and instruction available in most Head Start programs. Edward F. Zigler, "Formal Schooling for Four-Year-Olds? No," in Sharon L. Kagan and Edward F. Zigler, eds., *Early Schooling: The National Debate* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 27–44. Another disturbing, but very important, finding from the Perry Preschool study that has just been reported is that the program appears to work only for the girls. In a reanalysis of the Perry Preschool data, Helen Barnes found that "[m]ost of the significant long-term outcome differences in the Perry study occur between the treatment and control girls. Although there are differences in long-term outcomes between the two male groups, in most cases they are not significant." Helen Vagelos Barnes, "Predicting Long-Term Outcomes from Early Elementary Classroom Measures in a Sample of High-Risk Black Children," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1991.

[49]Ron Haskins, "Beyond Metaphor: The Efficacy of Early Childhood Education," *American Psychologist* 44 (2) (February 1989): 278. Haskins readily acknowledges, however, that the Head Start programs may actually enroll the most severely disadvantaged children and therefore the seemingly small improvements compared to non-Head Start children may underestimate the importance of the programs. For evidence that the Head Start children are more disadvantaged than poor children who do not enroll, see Valerie E. Lee, J. Brooks-Gunn, and Elizabeth Schnur, "Does Head Start Work? A 1-Year Follow-Up Comparison of Disadvantaged Children Attending Head Start, No Preschool, and Other Preschool Programs," *Developmental Psychology* 24 (2) (1988): 210–22; and Valerie E. Lee, J. Brook-Gunn, Elizabeth Schnur, and Fong-Ruey Liaw, "Are Head Start Effects Sustained? A Longitudinal Follow-up Comparison of Disadvantaged Children Attending Head Start, No Preschool, and Other Preschool Programs," *Child Development* 61 (1990): 495–507. For a lively debate on the efficacy of Head Start, see Lawrence J. Schweinhart and Gary D. Gottfredson,

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"Good Preschool Programs for Young Children Living in Poverty Produce Important Long-Term Benefits: Pro and Con," *Debates on Education Issues* 1 (5) (March/April 1990): 1–8. Despite the complexity and inconclusiveness of research on the long-term benefits of Head Start, many scholars and policy analysts continue to write about these programs rather uncritically. For a recent example of a very optimistic but rather one-sided appraisal of the effectiveness of Head Start, see Ernest L. Boyer, *Ready to Learn: A Mandate for the Nation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[50]Bloom, *Stability and Change*; Hunt, *Intelligence and Experience*; and Burton L. White, *The First Three Years of Life* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975).

[51]Orville G. Brim, Jr. and Jerome Kagan, eds., *Constancy and Change in Human Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980); W. Andrew Collins, ed., *Development During Middle Childhood: The Years from Six to Twelve* (Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 1984); and S. Shirley Feldman and Glen R. Elliott, eds., *At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[52]Constance Holden, "Head Start Enters Adulthood," *Science* 247 (23 March 1990): 1400–402; and Martin Woodhead, "When Psychology Informs Public Policy: The Case of Early Childhood Intervention," *American Psychologist* 43 (6) (June 1988): 443–54.

[53]One very interesting and useful review of the relative effectiveness of nine different types of educational interventions to help at-risk children learn to read did not find preschool programs by themselves to be effective. Instead, one-to-one tutoring in the early grades proved to be more beneficial. As the authors put it, "[t]he evidence presented here dispels the idea that any one year of early intervention will have substantial lasting impacts on reading achievements. There is no 'magic bullet' that sets students on the road to success. . . . *Intensive* early intervention must be followed by *extensive* changes in basic classroom instructional practices if all students are to succeed throughout their elementary years." Robert E. Slavin, Nancy L. Karweit, and Barbara A. Wasik, "Preventing Early School Failures: What Works?," Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, Report No. 26, Johns Hopkins University, November 1991.

[54]Kagan and Zigler, eds., *Early Schooling: The National Debate*; and Sharon L. Kagan, ed., *The Care and Education of America's Young Children: Obstacles and Opportunities*, Ninetieth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). For a provocative, but useful discussion of early child development and how it might relate to formal schooling, see Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

[55]National Task Force on School Readiness, *Caring Communities: Supporting Young Children and Families* (Alexandria, Va.: National Association of State Boards of Education, 1991), 9. Of course, there is now considerable debate over what exactly "school ready" means and what are the best ways of helping

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children in need. Some are using the concept of school readiness to call for very broad changes ranging from providing Head Start for all children to establishing universal health insurance. Boyer, *Ready to Learn.*

[56]Anne Stewart and Thomas Glabe, "Head Start: Percentage of Eligible Children Served and Recent Expansions," Congressional Research Service (30 July 1991) cited in National Task Force on School Readiness, *Caring Communities,* 20.

[57]*New York Times,* 22 January 1992.

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David K. Cohen and S. G. Grant

America's Children and Their Elementary Schools

AMERICA'S CHILDREN SEEM TO HAVE at least one large experience in common—school. They spend roughly one-quarter of their waking hours in classrooms, corridors, lunchrooms, and playgrounds, all under teachers' supervision. But the more we examine that experience, the less common it seems. For instance, we have observed and talked with Crystal Bebee, a young Caucasian woman in her second year of teaching in a large and generally prosperous city on America's West Coast. Her school is in the inner city, and it is a polyglot of racial and ethnic groups: Eleven of her second graders are Hispanic, eight are African-American, and six are Asian. Five are Caucasian. If culture has a significant influence on experience, these students must have wildly different experiences in school, even if they share a great distance from the conventional American mainstream. But if social class has a significant influence on experience, the students must have very similar lives in school. They are all poor; twenty-eight of the thirty students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program.

Just across town we visited a school in an extraordinarily affluent neighborhood. Most of Patricia Cawkins' fifth graders are Caucasians from very wealthy homes. They are more culturally homogenous than Ms. Bebee's students and seem much closer to the "conventional" mainstream. But several Asian children are in the class, and four Hispanic children from poor families ride buses into the neighborhood as part of a school desegregation program. Ms. Cawkins herself is African-American, and has taught in the school for nearly twenty years.

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Such contrasts are common in American education. Jean Bowers has been teaching in a Midwestern industrial city for nearly two decades, and nearly all of her second graders come from poor Appalachian families. Last year there was only one African-American girl and one Native American boy in a class of thirty. Many families subsist on welfare; domestic violence, drugs, broken families, and other problems abound. Paula Goddard teaches second grade just a few miles across town, in a school that enrolls African-American students from poor families. The school is in a run-down, racially segregated neighborhood that is plagued by crime, violence, drugs, poverty, and unemployment. These two classrooms are profoundly different because race plays such a large part in Americans' experience, but they are quite similar in some respects because students in both are poor. They also share a great distance from Joan Sealy's school a few miles away in one of the city's better neighborhoods. Ms. Sealy has taught in the district for more than twenty years, and all of her third graders come from middle-income homes. There are no Hispanics or African-Americans, but three or four children in last year's class came from recent European and Asian immigrant families. When we asked teachers and administrators about social problems in this school, they reported that many mothers worked and that the children were under considerable pressure to achieve.

Given such differences in class and culture, can we say that America's children attend common schools? Much evidence from the schools suggests they do not. While students in affluent neighborhoods often attend attractive and well-endowed schools, their counterparts in low-income neighborhoods find themselves in much worse facilities. Ms. Cawkins and her students work in a nicely designed and beautifully landscaped West Coast school, with a large, unfenced outdoor play area and an indoor gym. The library is large and well-stocked, and there is an up-to-date computer lab and a special science facility. Both the library and the science program owe a great deal to the school's aggressive parents' organization, perhaps more than to school district funds. And more than halfway across the country, Ms. Sealy's school could have been designed for Ms. Cawkins' neighborhood. The sleek, one-story wood-and-glass structure sits in the midst of trees and rolling lawns on a large site all its own, in an attractive residential area. The outdoor play area is large and unfenced, and the school's interior is open and colorful. It has a large gym and an ample library that is financed and staffed by the parents' organization. The surrounding houses are clean and well-

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kept, the lawns carefully groomed, and the comfortable streets are lined with large trees.

Yet Ms. Bebee and her second graders work in a drab, battered, and severely overcrowded building that is nearly a century old, even though they live in the same city as Ms. Cawkins and her students. Graffiti and broken windows abound, the playground is fenced and locked, and the school is flanked by rows of "portable" classrooms. There is no library, no computer lab, and no science facility. Ms. Bowers' Midwestern school is of the same vintage, though a different genre. It is a classic old-style big city school, a large, two-story, formal brick building with vast ceilings, high windows, and yawning hallways. Outside doors to the building are always locked because drunks regularly roam the streets (some used to wander inside), and armed men intermittently prowl the neighborhood. The school is worn but recently has been tidied up, and is not overcrowded. There is a large room full of new computers, a cafeteria, and a library. There also is a large playground and a gym. The playground must be carefully patrolled because of neighborhood violence, but the principal keeps a relentless watch and the children play outside in all but the worst weather.

Ms. Goddard's school on the other side of town looks very similar. Though the neighborhood is run-down, the old building has been put back into decent condition and has a large playground and an adequate library. It is unusual in one other respect. Several years ago a coalition of African-American parents became convinced that the city schools did not serve their children well and petitioned for a separate school. The district offered this building, the parents accepted, and the result has been quite remarkable. The school was designated as an "alternative" within the system and admission was made selective. Families must apply to the school, and parents must make explicit contracts about helping with students' work and regularly visiting the school. The school's parents and teachers share a strong commitment to the idea that all students should succeed in school.

These contrasts make it difficult to accept claims that America's young children attend common schools. School attendance policies, housing practices, and income differences all help to segregate students by either social and economic class, or by ethnicity and race, or both. The segregation is far from perfect, but a large fraction of America's children attend school with youngsters much like themselves, and have little direct experience of any other America. Children whose families are poor, African-American, Hispanic, or recent immigrants from Asia also often find themselves in the oldest

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facilities that public education has to offer. Some of the buildings are in terrible condition, and even those that have been kept up do not compare with the facilities that one can find in more affluent neighborhoods.

Yet if we look inside classrooms, instruction seems remarkably similar, and claims for common schools thus appear more plausible. For instance, despite the differences between their schools and students, both Ms. Bebee and Ms. Cawkins are serious and responsible teachers. They have presented students with a wide variety of tasks, carefully monitored their work, and offered copious assistance and praise. Much instruction has been organized around individual seatwork. Classroom discourse has been largely teacher-centered and focused on eliciting right answers. They both have treated knowledge by breaking it up into small factual segments and procedures.

These two classrooms closely resemble others that we observed. Ms. Goddard's, Ms. Bowers', and Ms. Sealy's classes are also quite similar despite great differences among their schools, students, and neighborhoods. All three are teacher-centered, and much of their work has focused on what some call basic skills. A good deal of instruction has consisted of distributing, collecting, and correcting student worksheets in reading and mathematics, and helping students to make their way through the sheets. Whole-class instruction often concerns the worksheets—introducing them, working a few lines together, making corrections, and the like. The only regular occasion on which students have interacted with one another over academic matters has been the ubiquitous reading groups, which are organized by ability. In all three classrooms, these interactions have centered either on teachers' questions and students' terse answers, or on "round robin" reading in which students successively read a few sentences aloud with no discussion.

Is the big news here that American schools frame vast inequalities in class and race, and thus compound children's social and cultural isolation? Or is it that children are offered roughly the same instruction, despite such differences? Social commentators like Horace Mann, W. E. B. Du Bois, James Coleman, and Christopher Jencks have attacked class or racial inequalities in American society and their effects on children's experience in school. Romantic critics like Thoreau, Twain, Dewey, and Paul Goodman complained about the humdrum routine of formal education and the deadening sameness of children's experience in school. Is elementary education distinguished chiefly for its similarities or gross differences?

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INSTRUCTIONAL REGULARITIES

The answers to these questions depend partly on what one looks for, and how one looks. Until recently, most commentators on instruction considered only its gross features and reported that classrooms were remarkably similar. One such feature is the way that schools are organized. Nearly all students and teachers work in the familiar egg-crate structure of individual classrooms. Twenty-five or thirty students spend nearly their entire day with a single teacher who offers instruction in all subjects. Students are assigned to single grades by age rather than being grouped in broader age ranges that span three or more years.[1] Most are promoted annually, but not in a group. Students and teachers therefore meet each other afresh each year, and must spend considerable time becoming acquainted, learning to get along together, and reviewing previous work. This regime joins two large liabilities—social and intellectual discontinuity, and much ensuing repetition of work.[2] Yet it has endured since the late 1800s, persisting through many efforts to promote such alternatives as multiage grading, continuous progress, team teaching, and subject matter specialization in teaching. It stands in sharp contrast to some other nations, in which the same students and teachers work together for at least several years.

Ability grouping within classes is another common feature of school organization in the United States.[3] Most students seem to be grouped for reading and math, often beginning in the first grade. In some cases this means that students who are believed to have similar levels of ability sit and work apart from others. In most reading lessons, for instance, a small group of students of similar ability will be gathered on one side of the class to work with the teacher while everyone else does seatwork. Usually there are three such groups, and a good part of reading instruction consists of the teacher working with one group after the other. But grouping also means that even when the entire class seems to be working as a whole, members of each group are given different levels of work. Teachers often try to disguise these distinctions, but students are well aware of ability grouping and the status differences that it entails. What is more, grouping counts. Students in lower groups typically get less demanding and more monotonous work, whether the group is reading together or working with the rest of the class.[4] Teachers often refer to this practice as "individualizing instruction," and report that it helps them to manage their work. In contrast, primary-grade students in

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Singapore, Japan, and other nations are not grouped and work on the same curriculum together.

The structure of students' work also is broadly similar across elementary classrooms. Most teachers employ a mixture of seatwork (when students work alone on a written assignment), work in small groups, and whole-class instruction, but seatwork has dominated. An early 1970s study found that on average, slightly more than 70 percent of class time was spent on seatwork.[5] Most whole-class instruction is either lectures or recitations concerning seatwork.[6] Serious discussion and sustained projects are rare.

Another similarity in instruction is the mechanical representation of knowledge. School subjects are segmented into seemingly unrelated domains: spelling usually is taught as though it was unrelated to reading and writing; writing has been taught as though it was unrelated to reading; grammar has been taught as though it was distinct from either reading or writing.[7] Knowledge also is segmented within subjects: children study lists of spelling words, sheets of places to be identified, pages of individual math problems, and the like. One commentator refers to such work as ". . . painting by the numbers."[8]

Most school books and other materials have supported this bits-and-pieces regime. Texts in reading, language arts, spelling, and math have presented knowledge in this fractured fashion, as have most worksheets for seatwork.[9] All of the teachers whom we discussed at the outset of this paper used such materials. Though the lists and sheets often puzzle learners, they are not intellectually complex: most teaching and learning concentrate on surface knowledge.[10] In reading, for example, teachers typically have focused on simple conceptions of the action in stories rather than trying to mine the meanings of text.[11] The stories themselves are bland, and intellectual controversy is unfamiliar. While teachers in some other nations routinely encourage students to make conjectures about the meaning of text, to question others' conjectures, and to support their ideas with argument and textual evidence, such work has been rare in US elementary schools.[12] Discussion, explanation, and justification of arguments are also uncommon in mathematics. Teachers and students usually treat knowledge as though it was fixed and given by authorities, not as though it was contested, constructed, and reconstructed in the search for understanding.[13]

Classroom discourse is also similar across elementary classrooms. Teachers question and students respond. Teachers lecture and students listen. After studying more than a thousand classrooms, John Goodlad concluded that ". . . explaining and lecturing were the most

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common activities. . . "[14] Teachers outtalk students by at least three to one.[15] Most discourse also is intellectually convergent—i.e., teachers fish for "right answers" which students typically offer up in single words, numbers, or short phrases. Often the work is so simple and predictable that students give the answer before teachers finish the question. Sustained discussion is quite rare in elementary schools, and students infrequently talk with one another as part of instruction.

Teachers' domination of instructional discourse is consistent with their other uses of authority. Traditionally they have managed nearly all of classroom life, from lining up for lunch to parsing sentences. Even though we think of this as a democratic and egalitarian society, authority is quite centralized in classrooms. In John Goodlad's study, more than one-half of elementary school students reported that they did not participate at all in choosing what they did in class.[16] Classroom authority is much more broadly diffused in societies that we think of as more hierarchical and authoritarian. Japanese students, for example, are taught to jointly manage a great deal of their lives and work together in school, and teachers deliberately avoid trying to manage everything in their classes.[17]

Reports of these similarities come from schools in rural areas, affluent suburbs, and central cities. Instruction seems quite homogenous across large demographic and economic differences. It also seems dull. Most observers portray elementary classrooms as drab, often boring, pitched at a low intellectual level, and largely controlled by teachers.[18] Students are passive. Yet few observers report that classroom life is harsh. Many teachers maintain tight control, but they frame it in an energetically happy manner. Some of the cheer is relentless, a "classroom management" tactic, but most teachers seem friendly, genuinely concerned about children, and encouraging. Few seem capricious, cruel, or cynical.[19] Even in neighborhoods that are plagued by poverty, violence, and social pathology, many schools offer children a relatively safe refuge and source of help. That certainly was true of Ms. Bebee's, Ms. Bowers', and Ms. Goddard's schools.

One would like to know how all this seems to children, but despite freight loads of research on schools and teaching, researchers rarely have inquired about how students see and understand school. Children's writing about school, of which there must have been a good deal, appears not to have been collected, studied or published. The few reports that do exist are paradoxical: most young children seem compliant, often friendly, and even eager participants in classrooms. John Goodlad wrote:

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> . . . having depicted a general picture of considerable passivity among students. . . I hasten to point out that students' views of life in their classrooms were not correspondingly negative. Rather, they tended to express liking for their subjects, view most teachers as concerned about them, and view most teachers as liking or even being enthusiastic about their work. Large percentages expressed liking for the dominating classroom activity of listening to their teachers.[20]

Despite a regime that offends many observers, most young students report that they like school and find it pleasant.[21]

INSTRUCTIONAL DIFFERENCES

The vignettes with which we began revealed some extraordinary educational disparities, but they are only the beginning. One set of differences arises because American public schools have fewer elements of common purpose and less common curriculum, assessment, and teacher education than most other nations. Our schools are politically quite decentralized, the market plays a comparatively large role and the state a modest one in US education, and Americans are more divided about educational purpose and content than many other peoples. Hence publishers, school systems, schools, and teachers have greater lattitude here than in many other systems. For instance, while texts are ubiquitous their content differs considerably. A recent study showed that fourth grade math textbooks often gave the same topics different treatments, and each covered topics that others ignored. Similarly, when fourth grade math achievement tests covered the same topics, they often did so differently and they frequently dealt with somewhat different topics. Most important, tests often covered topics differently than texts. The curriculum that teachers offer seems to vary remarkably despite similar pedagogy. Teachers who present arithmetic in quite conventional and mechanical ways differ in how they cover topics. They may all teach long division, but they present it differently, use different problems, and allocate time to it quite differently. Such differences occur even when teachers use the same textbook.[22] In contrast, in Japan, Singapore, France, and other nations, materials and examinations are more closely coordinated and have much more common content,[23] and classroom content coverage appears to be much more homogenous.[24]

> Teachers' habits and decisions are important in any system of instruction. But . . . [US] students' and teachers' preferences are not informed

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> by a plain system of common purposes and content. Classrooms around the world are of course traditional in form as well, often much more so than in the US. But classrooms here exhibit a distinctive sort of diffuse, academically relaxed traditionalism. Teachers' work is guided more by inherited practices and individual decisions than by any clear and common view of what is to be covered, how it is to be covered, and why. In this sense, American schools have the worst of both worlds.[25]

A second set of differences in education arises from disparities in wealth and taste among local school districts. In many countries, schools get roughly equal monies from central ministries, but US public education depends heavily on local voters' decisions to tax themselves. The local share of educational expenditures has been declining for decades, but local taxes still contribute a little more than one-half of the total local school revenues, on average. Since most districts use the property tax as their chief revenue source, and since both property wealth and the willingness to tax it vary widely among jurisdictions, local expenditures for schooling vary widely. State aid eases this situation somewhat; on average about 45 percent of local school revenues come from state government, and states use some of that to "equalize" among districts.[26] But great inequalities remain in most states, despite dozens of lawsuits, many weighty reports, and nearly three decades of struggle. The reasons are both political and fiscal. Less inequality would require substantial redistribution of state monies, additional state money, restrictions on local spending, or some combination of these measures. It is difficult to find money for such a cause, in part because it is even more difficult to find broad political support for redistribution.

Schools in poorer districts thus have less to spend, and they can buy less quality in education, as that is commonly understood. They typically pay teachers lower salaries and thus attract candidates with weaker formal qualifications. They also offer less diversified curricula and educational programs, and have less attractive facilities and instructional materials. Big city schools often are thought to suffer the most from these inequalities, but all sorts of districts are relatively poor, including many rural towns, working-class suburbs, and districts with little industry or many tax-exempt institutions. Indeed, from some angles the resource picture in big city schools looks surprisingly good. Historically they seem much better off than they were three or four decades ago because all public schools are better off. Average expenditures for public education increased from about $1,100 per pupil in 1950 to $5,200 per pupil in 1990. That was more

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than a four-fold increase in four decades, and most ships rose on the tide.[27] Additionally, the federal Chapter I program and related state programs directed money to schools that enroll students from disadvantaged circumstances, and many of those students live in older, larger cities. Thanks to Chapter I and related state programs, for example, Ms. Bowers' old and worn-down school has a computer room that seems as well-equipped as the one in Ms. Sealy's newer and much more attractive building. In fact, some schools in poor neighborhoods now have larger operating budgets per pupil than schools in the same districts that enroll students from middle-class homes. One analyst estimates that schools in Los Angeles with heavy enrollments of disadvantaged students probably spend one-third more per pupil than other schools in the same city that enroll students from middle-class homes.[28] Researchers in Chicago report that a similar situation is developing there.[29]

We attend to fiscal inequalities because they produce differences in school resources that commonly are thought to affect students' performance, but those relationships have become less clear over the past three decades. It was long thought that differences in learning were caused by differences in books, class size, qualified teachers, facilities, and other resources that money bought. Schools in well-to-do communities that spent plentifully on education got qualified teachers, fine facilities and educational materials, and students therefore achieved relatively well. Schools in poorer communities spent less, got less qualified teachers, poorer materials, and less well-equipped schools, and students therefore achieved relatively poorly. Just what teachers, facilities, and materials did to enhance or impede achievement was unexplored, partly because schools were seen as powerful institutions that worked simply: Added monies purchased better school resources and better school resources created better achievement, irrespective of differences in students' social and economic backgrounds.

Large-scale studies of schooling carried out between the mid-1960s and the mid-1970s told a different story. James Coleman and Christopher Jencks argued that what counted for education was the educational resources that students brought to school, not the schools' resources. Students whose families and communities had many social and cultural advantages arrived in class with plenty of educational resources. They found it relatively easy to make good use of what schools offered, and on average did relatively well on various measures of academic achievement. But students whose families and communities had fewer social and cultural advantages arrived with

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fewer educational resources. As a result they found it relatively difficult to make good use of what schools offered, and tended to do relatively poorly on tests and other measures of academic achievement. But if differences in school facilities, educational materials, and teachers' qualifications were found to be unrelated to differences in students' achievement, differences in schools' social composition seemed quite important.[30] Students who attended school with others from more advantaged families did better than students whose classmates were from less advantaged families. Coleman, Jencks, and others portrayed the social and economic status that children inherited as relatively powerful and schools as relatively powerless.[31] That idea deeply troubled educators, liberals, and advocates for minority-group or poor children. But if researchers saw the sources of academic achievement very differently, their new idea was no less simple than the older one: Added student resources created added achievement, irrespective of differences in school resources.

Studies that have been carried out since the mid-1970s permit us to paint still another picture, in which *both* schools' and students' resources count, but in more complex ways than earlier inquiries suggest. Many researchers now argue that how schools mobilize their educational resources is as significant as the resources that children bring to school. A variety of recent studies claim that teachers' actions and beliefs are crucially important to students' performance. For example, some elementary school teachers have coherent strategies for instruction and deploy lessons, books, and other resources in ways that are consistent with those strategies. They believe that their students can learn and that they have a large responsibility to help. They have definite objectives which instruction is organized to achieve. Though typically quite traditional and didactic, lessons are well thought-out, well organized, and paced. Teachers regularly check to determine how well students are doing, whether some need more work, and the like. In these and other ways, teachers work hard to make educationally fruitful connections with students. Typically they use the same conventional pedagogy and the same sorts of tests, worksheets, texts, and seatwork that we described earlier, but they use them as part of a well-crafted strategy to improve childrens' learning.[32]

In contrast, many other teachers do not seem to have a coherent strategy for instruction, and they deploy resources in a scattered and inconsistent fashion. They have vague objectives, and their lessons are not well thought-out and seem disorganized. Classroom work is poorly paced, and teachers either do not regularly check to see how

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students are doing, or if they do check, they do not make many midcourse corrections to accommodate students' responses. John Goodlad reported that more than half of the elementary students in his study said that they ". . . did not know what they were supposed to do in class."[33] Teachers of this sort do not exert themselves to make educationally fruitful connections with students; many act as though they believed that their responsibility was only to "present the material," and to let students get it if they can. And when such teachers work with children from disadvantaged circumstances, they often act as though they believed that students could handle only watered-down instruction.

There also is growing evidence that schools' collective characteristics significantly influence instructional effectiveness. Faculty and students in some schools share a vision of the purposes of instruction and a commitment to success—Ms. Goddard's school is a case in point. Teachers believe that they have an obligation to help students succeed, there is considerable collegiality, extensive contact between teachers and students in class and outside, and high morale. Schools of this sort approximate communities in which students and teachers evince a strong sense of responsibility for their own actions and for the common good. Many other schools are fragmented and anomic. Teachers, staff, and students share no common vision of instructional purposes, and have little common commitment to success. There is little collegiality, little contact among teachers and students outside of class, and morale often is low. On average, students in schools of the first sort do better than students in schools of the second sort.[34]

No one denies that students' educational resources are very important. Many children from socially and economically advantaged circumstances arrive in school able to read and even write, and find it easy to do well with the instruction that schools offer, even if it is routine and dull, or makes little apparent sense. But many students from much less advantaged circumstances come to school with more modest educational resources. Though often bright and curious, many have not learned to read or to write at home. They often receive little help with schoolwork, or lack enough food in the morning or a quiet space in which to read or do homework after school. Some grow up in such difficult circumstances that they arrive in school with little motivation to succeed, already alienated or openly hostile.[35]

But many researchers now argue that these circumstances are not the sole or even chief cause of poor achievement. If students from disadvantaged circumstances come to school relatively poorly pre-

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pared to capitalize on conventional instruction, most schools are ill-prepared to help these students. The students do not know how to deal with adults and conventional schoolwork; the teachers do not know how to organize books, lessons, and other conventional resources of education to take advantage of the curiosity and intelligence that most students initially bring to school. That mutual incapacity is crippling for many students and defeating for many teachers. It is complicated by ability groups, because students in lower groups tend to get thinner, slower, and less rich instruction, they have fewer opportunities to learn, and they learn less.[36] Moreover, the most disadvantaged students tend to be placed in the lowest groups with others like themselves. That is particularly troubling, for students are educational resources for each other as well as for themselves. Hence less advantaged students, who bring fewer educational resources to school, are likely not only to have thinner instruction but also fewer social resources of education. No malicious intent need be supposed: interactions between vast inequalities in American society and routine operations in schools are explanation enough.[37] The typical result is a pattern of growing disparities in school achievement: The longer students from disadvantaged circumstances stay in school, the further they fall behind their more advantaged peers. Present estimates are that roughly 40 percent of America's children are "educationally disadvantaged."[38]

These lines of inquiry have led commentators to think about educational resources quite differently. Rather than focusing chiefly on instructional materials, facilities, and teachers' formal qualifications, researchers increasingly attend to the ethical commitments, knowledge, and skills that guide teachers' use of materials and facilities. They also have broadened the notion of educational resources to embrace various collective attributes of schools and classrooms, including leadership, shared goals, collegiality, and the organization of instruction. These shifts mark a continuing movement in scholarly and professional interest away from conventional conceptions of educational resources that focus on broad formal categories like family status, teachers' qualifications, and schools' facilities, toward particular instructional practices and organizational arrangements, and the knowledge, skill, and organization that they entail.[39] They also mark a continuing tendency to define resources in terms of their salience to outcomes, rather than assuming such connections. These changes do not deny the significance of instructional materials, facilities, and teachers' formal qualifications, but they imply that their salience depends on how teachers deploy them.

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Hence while school resources matter, they matter in a more complex fashion than previously had been thought. If these ideas stand up to further scrutiny, educators and policymakers will have a much more satisfactory sense than before about what educational resources are and how they work. But as educational resources have been specified more fully, they have become less familiar and commonsensical, more subtle, and less tangible. If educators and policymakers wind up knowing much more about how schools work, they are likely to puzzle more about how to manage them. Things were simpler when dollars, books, and facilities seemed to count.

The investigations outlined above also have produced new ideas and arguments about school improvement. There is strong evidence that test scores rose for many students from disadvantaged circumstances as a result of a national movement to increase "basic skills" that took shape in the mid-1970s. Reformers promoted curriculum mandates, minimum competency tests, "effective schools," and "direct instruction," especially in districts with many poor and minority-group children. Between 1971 and 1988, black-white reading score differences in The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were cut in half for thirteen year olds, and they were cut by one-third for nine year olds. The disparity in mathematics achievement also was reduced by nearly half for thirteen year olds, and by slightly less than one-third for nine year olds. But large disparities remained. In 1988, roughly 80 percent of white nine year olds had at least "beginning skills and understanding" in mathematics, but after all the improvement in African-American students' scores, only slightly more than 50 percent of African-American nine year olds performed at the level of ". . . beginning skills and understanding . . ." in mathematics. Roughly the same proportions held for thirteen year olds.[40]

If the gains seem clear, commentators disagree about their meaning. Some believe they reflect better schooling, but others argue that social policy changes in the 1970s—i.e., general reductions in poverty, better housing, and improved welfare assistance—probably improved school performance for African-American and Hispanic children.[41] Others argue that the NAEP results reflect superficial teaching to the tests rather than more substantial basic skills instruction. Still others focus on continuing inequalities in achievement despite more money for schools that serve students from disadvantaged circumstances. They argue that unequal achievement persists because school improvement has been spotty and many added expenditures have been nonstrategic. One key reason is that pro-

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grams to improve education for students from disadvantaged circumstances typically do not package funds wisely. The new monies arrive in targeted mandates that require spending on something specific, like classroom aides, or special project staff, or transportation. Such mandates often produce bizzare results, like classrooms with the required special staff or services but without adequate books and other materials. Much of the increased money also has been used simply to raise teachers' salaries, or to hire more teachers, even though researchers already had found that such expenditures were unrelated to student achievement.[42]

Another key reason that achievement disparities persist is that most efforts to reduce them have been fragmentary. They focused on a single intervention like parent education, preschool programs, direct tutoring, classroom aides, or special curricula. Students sometimes learned more than otherwise would have been expected, but the effects were either not large, not sustained, or both. More comprehensive interventions seemed to have larger and more lasting effects. They combined several elements—such as parent education, direct tutoring, and special curricula—into coherent programs that dealt with the varied problems that students and teachers had. Such broad and sustained interventions can dramatically improve education for students from disadvantaged circumstances, but they are much more time consuming, expensive, and difficult to organize than single-shot efforts.[43] Less focused and thinner efforts have more modest results but are easier and cheaper, and thus more popular.

INSTRUCTION REVISITED

All of this suggests that our earlier portrait of homogeneity in instruction was incomplete. While curriculum, pedagogy, and instructional materials are relatively similar in most elementary schools, they also differ in many other ways. Students in lower ability groups have fewer opportunities to learn, and they learn less. Students in Chapter I classes may have similar experiences. Instructional materials often are unequally distributed: while nearly all classrooms have texts, schools in poorer districts tend to have older books. Classrooms also differ within districts in how many other books are on hand. Ms. Sealy's students had more than one hundred mostly new volumes, but a few miles across town Ms. Bowers' students had only a few dozen old, tattered books. Moreover, there are significant differences in teachers' and schools' capacities to

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effectively use the instructional resources they have. Some students from disadvantaged circumstances have remarkably constructive educational experiences—for instance, Ms. Goddard's alternative school has raised average test scores from the bottom of the city's heap nearly to the very top, roughly equalling scores in Ms. Sealy's school. That is an astonishing reversal in only a few years, and a remarkable achievement for the school considering the advantages that students in Ms. Sealy's school have. But it is unusual. Ms. Bowers' school has improved, but not nearly as much as Ms. Goddard's, and teaching and learning continue much more dismally in most of the city's other Chapter I schools.

Finally, we must note two sorts of classrooms to which our analysis does not apply. At one extreme are unsafe or damaging classes in which students are out of control, or teachers are thoroughly incompetent or cruel, or both. Informed observers in several big cities estimate that about 5 percent of elementary classes fall into this category, and that they disproportionately enroll African-American or Hispanic children from poor families.[44] At the other extreme are unusually rich and unconventional classrooms. Instruction in them is more demanding than usual, and less didactic. Students read deeply, textbooks are less in evidence, extended academic projects are common, and students often pursue complex independent or small-group work. Teachers are better educated than is typical, and many avidly continue their studies. Classrooms of this sort are uncommon. Though sometimes found in big cities, and even in their poorest neighborhoods, they seem to occur more often in well-to-do suburbs like Winnetka, Shaker Heights, Newton, and Brookline, and in some elite independent schools. We know of no estimate of the incidence of such instruction, but we would be surprised if it exceeded 2 percent of elementary classrooms.

CHANGE IN INSTRUCTION

One other crucial feature of contemporary life in elementary schools is change in instruction. Nearly all of the teachers whom we discussed at the outset recently made remarkable revisions in what they teach, how they teach, and how they understand teaching and learning. For example, Ms. Sealy's Midwestern school adopted a very different curriculum, in which reading is envisioned as making sense of text instead of as a collection of isolated facts and skills that are learned by rote. The basal readers, with predictable pasteurized stories, are

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gone. Now students read real stories and other more substantial material. That is a huge change for Ms. Sealy, but it is only the beginning. The ability groups in which she once read with a few students while others did seatwork also are gone. Most reading instruction now is done with the whole class. She tries to get everyone to participate in discussions of literature, to help them make sense of text, to sharpen their understanding and appreciation by figuring out what they think a passage means, explaining their ideas, discussing them with others, and revising their views in light of evidence and argument.

The chief occasion for this change was her school's decision to try out a new reading text series that is oriented to literature and comprehension of text instead of phonics. That change sprang from a major shift in opinion among reading specialists and researchers, away from a vision of reading instruction as drill and practice on skills and facts toward an emphasis on complex thought and interpretation. The state education department had embraced the new vision in its pronouncements about curriculum and instruction, and had invited the schools to follow suit. It organized workshops for local educators, and revised state achievement tests. Ms. Sealy reports that her students are quite engaged with the new approach. She says that they "love the books," and are much more excited by their classwork than students ever were before. During one of our visits she wondered aloud how she ever taught differently for all those years, and seemed a bit disappointed at all the missed opportunities.

Ms. Patricia Cawkins works in a much larger city in a West Coast state, yet her teaching has changed in quite similar ways. She too uses a new "literature-based" text that her district recently adopted in response to new ideas about reading and a revised state policy. Her basal readers also are gone. The last time we visited, the class was reading several novels. Ms. Cawkins has also changed the pace and organization of instruction. District officials told teachers that they are no longer expected to finish the textbook, and encouraged them to create larger and more complex units around particular stories or novels. Ms. Cawkins quickly took advantage of this. For instance, while reading *North to Freedom* she asked students to write letters to the main character, to create freehand maps of Europe tracing his route, and to write daily diary entries from his perspective. The discourse in Ms. Cawkins' class also has changed. She asked students more sophisticated questions, inviting them to draw inferences from text rather than recite facts. Some of her queries were more open-ended than before—for example, she asked students to predict

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upcoming events in a story as a way to help them think about the story line.

One might expect such things for the relatively privileged children whom Ms. Sealy and Ms. Cawkins teach, but Ms. Bebee is following a similar course in her shabby inner-city school. She has eliminated ability groups in reading and thrown away the basal reader. She does most instruction with the whole class. Like Ms. Sealy and Ms. Cawkins, these changes were associated with a shift in state policy, with broader changes in research and professional knowledge, and with the district's adoption of a new "literature-based" text series. Her Hispanic, African-American, Asian, and Caucasian students now talk about what stories mean, why characters act as they do, and how a story's setting helps them to understand what is happening. She reports that she has much more flexibility and no longer rushes to "finish the book" at a story-a-week pace. The units that she teaches are larger and include more related readings and activities. For example, the class read "Jack and the Beanstalk" in the new text's fairy tale section, but Ms. Bebee then dug up three other versions of the story, each with a different ending. She read them with her students, encouraging them to compare the stories and discuss the similarities and differences. She also had the class read several related stories, like "The Giant Who Threw Tantrums," and she created several related writing activities, for example, ". . . if you planted some magic seeds, what would they grow?" She developed art projects for the students on related topics, and even had students plant seeds in paper cups and observe them. Though Ms. Bebee's students come from very poor families, their reading and writing lessons are more rich and lively than those of many more privileged children.

Ms. Paula Goddard, who teaches disadvantaged African-American students, has made many similar changes in her Midwestern classroom. She had taught a didactic, skills-based curriculum for several years as part of the school's effort to raise students' achievement. Like her colleagues, she organized reading around a basal text. She did all of the skill exercises with students and supplemented them with worksheets on phonics. There were five ability groups for reading, and little of the work had anything to do with understanding or interpreting text. But now most instruction is done with the entire class. Ms. Goddard also abandoned the old system in which students of lower ability had less challenging and interesting reading. All students now use the same reader and discuss the stories together.

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Ms. Goddard's questions about the stories are often more open-ended, and the class discussions are more extended.

Given the usual fare in America's elementary classrooms, these are remarkable changes. They are connected to an equally remarkable movement for school reform. In the last six or eight years, educators, politicians, and business leaders have argued that students must become independent thinkers and enterprising problem solvers, that schools should offer intellectually challenging instruction that is deeply rooted in the academic disciplines. These proposals were built on several decades of research in which investigators rejected simple behaviorist pictures of learning as the accumulation of discrete facts and skills, and sketched a view in which judgment, complex thought, and content figured prominently. Reformers also are trying to create state and national instructional frameworks, curricula, and examination systems that would embody much more common and demanding standards. They are trying to create a national system of teacher certification that embodies much more demanding standards for content and pedagogy. These unprecedented ideas have begun to find significant support among state and national agencies. The California State Department of Education has been urging such ideas on schools there since 1985, as are several other states. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics has launched a campaign to replace rote memorization of facts and procedures with deep understanding of mathematical ideas in all American schools. Researchers and reformers concerned with reading and writing are pressing a parallel approach in schools across the country. Professional associations and disciplinary groups are writing new curricula and instructional standards, publishers have begun to produce richer texts, and novel examinations—that would be much less superficial and would assess a broader range of knowledge than standardized tests—are being designed. Recent opinion surveys even suggest that national curricula and tests have broad support among American adults.[45]

These new ambitions are encouraging for anyone who hopes children might have intellectually more substantial lives in school, and our vignettes suggest that things have begun to change. But no one knows how far the changes have spread, or how long they will continue. It seems very likely that if the reforms do continue, teachers will face many difficulties, for taking the reform agenda seriously will place enormous demands on their knowledge and skills. Few are familiar with literature, let alone literary theory, and few read regularly or deeply. As a result, most teachers working on their own might not be able to move very far beyond the sorts of changes that

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we already observed. For instance, though the teachers whom we have observed more often discuss books and stories, most of this work has been relatively superficial. Many tend to focus on surface features of the action, setting, and characters, rather than probing what stories mean or how characters are developed. And reading is most teachers' strongest suit. Few are literate in mathematics, and fewer still know much about science, so change in these subjects would be even more difficult.[46]

Another difficulty for teachers is that reformers want students to become active, engaged, and collaborative learners who grapple with deep problems in academic subjects. Yet even if teachers learned much more about those subjects, they would not necessarily know how to teach in this way. After all, universities are full of professors who know their material deeply yet teach didactically and encourage students to learn passively. In order to promote active, engaged, and collaborative learning, teachers must know how to set problems that will be fruitful and engaging for students, which is more difficult than merely assigning pages to read or the problems at the end of the chapter.[47] They have to know how to help students to work on those problems without either doing it for them or letting them sink. They have to know how to use some students' work to help others to learn. In effect, teachers would have to organize instruction so that students produced much more of it. As teachers become coaches or conductors, and abandon more familiar and didactic roles in which they "tell knowledge," students would have to become much more active, thoughtful, and hard-working, and abandon their present less taxing role as passive absorbers of predigested knowledge.

This is a large agenda for change. It is easy to see that many teachers whom we have been visiting have begun to change, but it is difficult to agree on the scope and significance of what they have done. In light of past practices, teachers seem to have taken giant steps in a new direction, but viewed in light of reformers' aspirations, it looks as though they have barely begun. Though Ms. Cawkins uses very different materials, has abandoned ability groups, and conducts whole-class reading lessons, her discussions feature many literal recall questions. Her spelling lessons use lists of words that have been selected from the stories and books students are reading, but the lessons still focus quite traditionally on drill and practice of words isolated from any use in text. There are important new structures and materials in this class, but they are framed by old ideas and practices. Many other classes present a similar picture. If we watched them through a one-way mirror and had only the video channel open, they

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would seem very different because the organization has changed from ability groups to whole-class work. But if we could only listen to the discourse, things would sound very much like past practice because the discourse structure and treatment of knowledge are so similar. Tuning in both the audio and video produces a result that seems full of contradictions.

Many reformers would say that teachers simply need to learn more so they could ask more thoughtful questions and respond more adequately to students' comments. But teachers' opportunities to learn are in distressingly short supply. Few elementary schools offer teachers many chances to improve their practice, and most continuing university education programs for teachers have a dismal reputation. Undergraduate education rarely offers intending elementary teachers extended opportunities to learn deeply about the subjects they will teach or how to teach thoughtfully and responsibly.[48] Reformers argue that changes should be made in schools and higher education to open up sufficient opportunities for teachers to learn, but most of those institutions lack the resources, dispositions, or incentives to change. They also argue for the creation of new agencies for teacher education as part of reform itself, but that would be an immense task, perhaps no easier than changing the existing institutions.[49]

These problems are more puzzling when one considers students from disadvantaged circumstances. There are some encouraging signs in our earlier stories about Ms. Bebee and Ms. Goddard. Both teachers have made significant changes despite difficult circumstances. Both have learned a great deal in a short time, and both seem disposed to learn more. But both teachers retain many didactic features in their practice, and much of their reading teaching looks like old wine in new bottles. For example, Ms. Bowers' ideas about reading have changed dramatically in the last few years, due in part to her studies for a master's degree at a local university. She had seen reading quite conventionally, as nothing but little bundles of discrete facts and skills that students learned, each by itself, by rote. She thought that the standard three or four reading groups made sense, and was a devotee of basal texts. But she now believes that reading is a matter of understanding text rather than memorizing isolated skills and facts. She seems quite convinced that it is best for children to learn to make sense of text, to interpret what they read, to ask and answer questions about the meaning of text as they read along.

But Ms. Bowers does not teach reading as she thinks it should be taught. Though she uses a few of the reform ideas, most of her

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teaching is quite traditional. Her class has three or four ability groups, she relies heavily on basal readers, and instruction focuses on drill and practice of basic skills. One reason is that her school system has a rigid scheme for guiding instruction that is keyed to a basic skills curriculum, and specifies what is to be taught each week in each grade. Ms. Bowers says that if she taught reading as she now believes it should be taught, some of her students would learn much more about reading and would like it more. But she thinks they probably would not do well on the tests that were designed with a much more traditional conception of reading in mind. She would then be in trouble with the principal, and he would be in trouble with the central office.

Many teachers face similar impediments. Some work in districts with instructional schemes like those in Ms. Bowers' district, most of which were devised during the back to basics crusade. Others work in districts that have rigidly structured Chapter I programs that are focused on basic skills instruction, and thus would make it difficult for teachers to take a more thoughtful and flexible approach. Though many states and localities are adopting new approaches to reading, few have revised their Chapter I programs. There are some proposals to radically change this program, but that would require the repeal of an entire generation of state and federal regulations and guidelines, and the disestablishment of many institutions and social arrangements that were created to support a highly structured approach to instruction and a simplified administrative order. It also would require that teachers and administrators unlearn the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make sense in the established basic skills curriculum, and that they learn everything that a new education might require. New institutions and arrangements that would support a very different and much more demanding approach to instruction also would have to be invented.

But Ms. Bowers has a larger problem. She is not at all sure that she would teach differently even if those institutional difficulties were swept away. She points out that most of her students are the offspring of poor families from Appalachia and many have serious problems. Nearly everyone is poor, many of the children are abused or neglected, and few do well in school. Ms. Bowers is unsure whether they would do better with a much more ambitious approach to reading. She thinks that some would but most would not. Despite what she heard while studying for her master's degree, she thinks that many of her students would have much more trouble with a more

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flexible and demanding curriculum, and that some would sink entirely.

Ms. Bowers is not unique. Like many teachers in disadvantaged neighborhoods, she thinks that her students begin with few of the social resources that commonly support excellent instruction. They come from families that have little education, and often have been on welfare for generations. Many have teenage mothers, or come from chronically unemployed single-parent families, or both. More and more come from homeless families, or have drug-addicted parents, or are abused, or some combination of these. Many were born underweight or malnourished, and an unknown number have been damaged before birth by crack cocaine and alcohol. Their neighborhoods pulsate with increasingly violent crime.[50] Like many teachers, Ms. Bowers thinks that her students need structured, predictable, and stable lives in school because the rest of their lives are so chaotic.

PAST, PRESENT, AND PROSPECT

Like the teachers whom we have been observing, we are puzzled about the prospects for further change. One reason is the difficulties that we just discussed. Another is that the precedents for change are unclear: though public schools have altered quite dramatically in some respects, they have changed little in others. Classroom culture and organization have changed most remarkably. In 1880, students' desks and chairs were bolted down in rows facing front. Discipline was so tight that students needed individual permission for a trip to the bathroom. Students and teachers addressed each other formally, and teachers dressed formally. Classrooms slowly grew less regimented through the twentieth century, a development that picked up speed in the 1960s and early 1970s. Teachers are more considerate of children than they were nine decades ago, discipline has greatly relaxed, and the tone of classrooms is much less formal. The furniture is movable, and is often moved to accommodate activities. Many elementary students now sit in "cooperative learning" groups of four or five, facing each other. Teachers dress much more casually. Students have appreciably more autonomy; they are able to move around more freely to do their work, and most seem able to go to the bathroom when they wish. In many classrooms they also enter and leave at their own initiative to attend special classes or other activities. Even teachers who describe themselves as stern disciplinarians tolerate noise, side conversations, and mischief that would have

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been quickly stamped out a generation or two ago. These might seem trivial changes to adults in the 1990s, but they would seem revolutionary to teachers and students who were visiting from the 1940s.[51]

Classroom discourse also has been altered quite remarkably. In 1900, students and teachers typically worked within a rigid recitation format.[52] Teachers put questions to individual students who were expected to answer on the spot. A great premium was placed on speed and precision, and the entire exercise was conducted at a brisk clip.[53] There was little or no room for students to amplify a point, let alone to ask questions or discuss the matter. Students usually had to stand when called on to speak, and often were graded on posture and deportment. Recitations now are a much diminished feature of the elementary landscape, and when they do occur, they are much less formal. Additionally, students often manage more of their own instruction.

The materials of instruction have changed as well. There are many more texts, supplementary works, and trade books for children than there were in the 1950s. These materials are much more diverse in style, format, content, and intended audience than ever before. They also are better designed and more attractively presented than anything that was available in the 1950s, let alone in 1900. In addition, new instructional media—television, radio, audiotape, videotape, and computers—are making their way into classrooms, and some open up astonishing instructional possibilities.

But if these changes seem to augur well for reformers today, several other features of instruction have persisted more or less intact for at least a century. The inherited egg-crate, age-graded organization of school life is intact, and so is the snapshot approach to topic definition and content coverage. Conceptions of knowledge seem little changed. While the recitation has receded in formality and importance, the bits-and-pieces intellectual regime that it accompanied is still dominant. Discourse is much less rigid, but students typically take little intellectual initiative and teachers still control the conversation. Authority is more relaxed in classrooms, but teachers are very much in charge.[54] New and often exciting materials and media generally are used within the inherited intellectual regime.[55]

Reformers thus have had much more success changing the culture and social organization of classrooms, and the quality of educational materials, than they have had changing the core features of instruction. One reason is that changes in classroom culture and social organization were supported by parallel shifts in American social life, but there has been no broad social support for change in the core of

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academic instruction. Yet such change is exactly what the recent reforms would require.

Another reason that we are puzzled about the prospects for further change concerns the political and economic circumstances of reform. The current proposals for change began to catch Americans' imagination just as our institutions began to stagger under the economic legacy of the Reagan years. Several years of recession following federal budget cuts have produced massive fiscal shortfalls in many states and localities, and education and social service budgets are being slashed. California's state government has led the reforms, but it just struggled through two years of dramatic cuts in education, and greater reductions are expected. Additionally, the incentives to work hard in school are weak for many students. Many skilled and semiskilled workers have lost jobs in manufacturing and have had to take unskilled work in service industries. Many high school graduates can look forward either to similar prospects or no work at all. Youth unemployment is high everywhere, and appallingly high in African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods.

The prospects for further change thus seem quite mixed. An impressive intellectual agenda is developing for public education, and ambitious new standards and assessments seem to promise a better and more challenging life in schools. Teaching has begun to change, but it will take extraordinary efforts to sustain and extend the new work. Indeed, it would take a considerable effort for most schools simply to do a much better job of conventional instruction with conventionally advantaged children. More unusual measures would be required to do a much better job of conventional instruction in schools that enroll the children whom America traditionally has neglected or rejected. Truly astonishing efforts would be required to radically reform instruction for those children. That is the most worrisome prospect now. Educators and reformers are increasingly committed to ambitious ideas about instruction, but they work in an appallingly unequal society, in which the incentives for thoughtful instruction are mixed at best, with a weakly educated teaching force during a period of shrinking budgets and increasing social distress. Should the recent reforms continue, advantaged students will have a much easier time making use of them than students from disadvantaged families. Lacking quite remarkable efforts by schools and other social institutions, radical educational reform probably would improve instruction for some American children, but at the price of increasingly unequal achievement.

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ENDNOTES

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[2]Ibid., 205–208.

[3]For a recent review, see Robert Slavin, "Synthesis of Research on Grouping in Elementary and Secondary Schools," *Educational Leadership* (September 1988): 67–76.

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[6]Goodlad, *A Place Called School,* 230.

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[7]See, for instance, Ibid., 205–206.

[8]Ibid., 108. He reports elsewhere that most class work is ". . . basic facts and skills." Ibid., 236.

[9]The organization of time among subjects has also been similar across classrooms. See Ibid., 199, Table 7–1.

[10]Many commentators now argue that this conception of knowledge has been reinforced by the structure of standardized achievement tests. See Daniel P. Resnick and Lauren B. Resnick, "Standards, Curriculum, and Performance: A Historical and Comparative Perspective," *Educational Researcher* 14 (1985): 5–20.

[11]See Doris Durkin, "Reading Comprehension Instruction in Five Basal Reader Series," *Reader Research Quarterly* 16 (1981): 515–44.

[12]Jana Mason, Richard Anderson, Akimichi Omura, Nobuko Uchida, and Mutsumi Imai, *Learning to Read in Japan,* Technical Report No. 449 (Urbana, Ill.: Center for the Study of Reading, 1989).

[13]Susan Stodolsky finds that these tendencies are less pronounced in social studies than in arithmetic lessons. See *The Subject Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). John Goodlad reports a similar pattern in the arts, physical education, and vocational education; see Goodlad, *A Place Called School,* 115.

[14]Goodlad, *A Place Called School,* 104.

[15]Ibid., 229.

[16]Ibid., 109.

[17]Thomas Rohlen, "Order in Japanese Society: Attachment, Authority and Routine," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 15 (1) (1989): 5–40.

[18]These ideas are as old as public education. Horace Mann complained of drab and dominating teaching in several of his Annual Reports to the Massachusetts Board of Education.

[19]Goodlad reports that his team observed "little punitive behavior"; Goodlad, *A Place Called School, 111.*

[20]Ibid., 113. For example, though most elementary students in Goodlad's study reported that they "always do what my teacher tells me to do," and "I do all the work that my teacher gives me," they rejected the view that "there was a too strict set of class rules." Ibid., 110.

[21]Goodlad's student respondents reported that their teachers were much more positive than negative toward them; Ibid., 111. American students repeatedly report high levels of satisfaction with school. Most recently, see Committee On Economic Development, *An Assessment of American Education* (New York: Committee on Economic Development, 1992), and A. Powell, E. Farrar, and D. K. Cohen, *The Shopping Mall High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985).

[22]See Goodlad, *A Place Called School,* 110. D. Freeman, T. Kuhs, A. Porter, R. Floden, W. Schmidt, and J. Schwille, "Do Textbooks and Tests Define a National Curriculum in Elementary School Mathematics?" *The Elementary School Journal* 83 (5) (1983):501–14. A. Porter et al., "Content Determinants in Elementary

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School Mathematics," in D. A. Grouws, T. J. Cooney, and D. Jones, eds., *Effective Mathematics Teaching* (Reston: The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Inc., 1988), 96–113. See also D. J. Freeman and A. C. Porter, "Do Textbooks Dictate the Content of Mathematics Instruction in Elementary Schools?" *American Educational Research Journal* 26 (3) (Fall 1989).

[23]See, for example, D. Stevenson and D. Baker, "State Control of the Curriculum and Classroom Instruction," *Sociology of Education* 64 (1991): 1–10.

[24]Ibid.

[25]D. K. Cohen and J. S. Spillane, "Policy and Practice: The Relations Between Governance and Instruction," *Review of Research in Education* (Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association, April 1992), 3–49.

[26]US Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics* (Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education, 1990), 47, Table 35. See also John Coons, William Clune, and Stephen Sugarman, *Private Wealth and Public Education* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970), and Allan Odden, *School Finance Reform in the States* (Denver, Colo.: Education Commission of the States, 1981).

[27]These figures are in constant 1990 dollars. US Department of Education, *The Condition of Education, Vol. 1 Elementary and Secondary Education* (Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education, 1991), 88.

[28]Personal communication from Allan Odden, 6 May 1992.

[29]F. Hess, "Midway Through School Reform In Chicago," *International Journal of Educational Reform* 1 (3) (July 1992): 270–84.

[30] James Coleman, Ernest Campbell, Carol Hobson, James McPartland, Alexander Mood, Frederic Weinfeld, and Robert York, *Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1966). Christopher Jencks, Marshall Smith, Henry Ackland, Mary Jo Bane, David Cohen, Herbert Gintis, Barbara Heyns, and Stephen Michelson, *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (New York: Basic, 1972); E. Hanusheck, "The Economics of Schooling," *Journal of Economic Literature* 24 (3) (September 1986): 1141–177; Coleman et al., *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. One of us (Cohen) was a participant in this line of work.

[31]These conclusions depended on school resources being relatively equally distributed within the United States; nearly all students had schools, books, teachers, and the like. In less developed societies, resources typically are distributed much more unequally, and even the relatively crude measures of resources that were used in these studies turned up much more potent effects for educational resources in less developed societies than in the United States. See Bruce Fuller and Stephen Heyneman, "Third World School Quality: Current Collapse, Future Potential," *Educational Researcher* 18 (1989): 12–19.

[32]Thomas Good and Jere Brophy, *Looking in Classrooms,* 4th ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1987). Robert Slavin, Nancy Karweit, and Barbara Wasik, "Preventing Early School Failure: What Works?," Center For Research On Effective Schooling For Disadvantaged Students (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, August 1991); S. Purkey and M. Smith, "Effective Schools: A Review," *Elemen-*

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tary School Journal 83 (4) (1983): 428–52. For secondary schools, see A. Bryk and V. Lee, *Catholic High Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

[33]Ibid., 112.

[34]See Purkey and Smith, "Effective Schools," and Bryk and Lee, *Catholic High Schools*.

[35]See, for example, Nettie Legters and Robert Slavin, "Elementary Students At Risk," (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students, May 1992); Robert Slavin and Nancy Madden, "What Works for Students At Risk: A Research Synthesis," *Educational Leadership* 46 (5) (February 1989): 4–13. Researchers estimate that between 30 and 40 percent of American students are educationally disadvantaged; see Gary Natriello, Edward McDill, and Aaron Pallas, *Schooling Disadvantaged Children: Racing Against Catastrophe* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990).

[36]Barr and Dreeben, *How Schools Work*; see also Jeannie Oakes, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985).

[37]Some commentators do argue that unequal schooling also results from efforts to reduce it, because state and federal programs intended to improve education for the "educationally deprived" have degraded it instead. Federal programs designed to improve education for the children of the poor created separate classes, commonly termed "pull-outs," where students from disadvantaged circumstances were sent to be taught by teachers who specialized in their kind. The classes made it easier for states and localities to claim that they were meeting federal audit requirements that money only be spent on "target" students, but some researchers now charge that Chapter I created a separate and unequal curriculum in which students have a less substantial and interesting curriculum than their home classes (about 4.2 million elementary school students are served by Chapter I, which is roughly 14 percent of all elementary school students in the United States. This estimate is from Natriello et al., *Schooling Disadvantaged Children*). Students' education also is said to be inchoate, diffuse, and repetitive because there is little coordination between Chapter I and regular instruction. Because Chapter I has been under great political pressure to demonstrate that it improves academic performance, instruction often has been tied to the standardized achievements tests that are used to evaluate programs; students are taught what standardized tests measure. See Anne McGill-Franzen and Richard Allington, "Flunk 'em or Get Them Classified: The Contamination of Accountability and Data," (Albany: SUNY/Albany); and Brenda Turnbull, "Testing in Chapter I: Issues and Options," (Washington, D.C.: Policy Studies Associates, July 1991).

[38]This estimate is from Natriello et al., *Schooling Disadvantaged Children: Racing Against Catastrophe*.

[39]See, for example, Lee Shulman, "Those Who Understand, Teach: Knowledge Growth in Teaching," *Educational Researcher* 15 (1986): 4-14, and Magdalene Lampert, "How Do Teachers Manage to Teach? Perspective on Problems in Practice," *Harvard Educational Review* 55 (1985): 178–94.

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[40]Educational Testing Service, *America's Challenge: Accelerating Academic Achievement* (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1990), Table 3.1.

[41]M. Smith and J. O'Day, "Systemic School Reform," in S. H. Fuhrman and B. Malen, eds., *The Politics of Curriculum and Testing* (New York: Falmer, 1991), 233–68.

[42]Jencks et al, *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*; and Hanushek, "The Economics of Schooling."

[43]See R. Slavin, N. Karweit, and N. Madden, *Effective Programs For Students At Risk* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1989); Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik, "Preventing Early School Failure: What Works?," Center For Research On Effective Schooling For Disadvantaged Students (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, August 1991).

[44]Interviews with Raymon Cortines, San Francisco, February 1992, and Anthony Alvarado, New York City, November 1991. These estimates gain some support from students' and teachers' reports. Five percent of eighth grade teachers report that vandalism is a problem in their schools, and 7 percent report that physical conflict among students is a problem. Only 1.7 percent report that physical abuse of teachers is a problem in their school, but 10 percent report that verbal abuse of teachers is a problem. Students' reports are somewhat different. Eighth grade students agree with teachers on the incidence of verbal abuse of teachers, but they are four times as likely to report physical abuse of teachers as teachers are. And students are twice as likely to report physical conflict among students as teachers, and three times as likely to report that vandalism is a problem. US Department of Education, *Condition of Education,* 80. We are more inclined to accept teachers' reports on everything but physical conflict among students, and we are unsure how seriously to rank conflict among students as a problem in school.

[45]See Marshall Smith, Jennifer O'Day, and David Cohen, "National Curriculum, American Style: What Might It Look Like?" *American Educator* 14 (1990): 10–17.

[46]Post et al., "Intermediate Teachers' Knowledge of Rational Number Concepts"; and Thompson, "The Relationships of Teachers' Conceptions of Mathematics Teaching to Instructional Practice."

[47]See, for example, Shulman, "Those Who Understand, Teach"; Magdalene Lampert, "Knowing, doing, and teaching multiplication," *Cognition and Instruction* 3 (1986): 305–42; Suzanne Wilson, *Mastadons, Maps, and Michigan: Exploring Uncharted Territory While Teaching Elementary School Social Studies* (East Lansing, Mich.: Institute for Research on Teaching, 1990); and Deborah Ball, *Halves, Pieces, and Twoths: Constructing Representational Contexts in Teaching Fractions* (East Lansing, Mich.: National Center for Research on Teacher Education, 1988).

[48]W. McKeachie, P. Pintrich, Y. Lin, and D. Smith, *Teaching and Learning in the College Classroom: A Review of the Research Literature* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: National Center for Research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning, 1986).

[49]For further discussion, see D. Cohen and C. Barnes, "A New Pedagogy for Policy?," in D. Cohen, M. McLaughlin, and J. Talbert, *Teaching For Understanding* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993).

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[50]For one pertinent account see Elizabeth Kolbert, "School That Battles to Save Small Souls," *New York Times,* 8 November 1991.

[51]Though Goodlad, *A Place Called School,* 94, reports little change in junior and senior high schools, he seems to affirm such changes in the primary grades. He notes that his team saw a ". . . picture of increasing drabness as one moves upward through the grades." Ibid., 227.

[52]Romiett Stevens, *The Question as a Measure of Efficiency in Instruction* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1912); and Cuban, *How Teachers Taught.*

[53]Ibid.

[54]Stevens, *The Question as a Measure of Efficiency in Instruction*; Cuban, *How Teachers Taught*; and D. Cohen, "Teaching Practice: Plus ca Change. . ., " National Center for Research on Teacher Education (Michigan: Michigan State University, 1988).

[55]Larry Cuban, *Teachers and Machines: The Classroom Use of Technology Since 1920* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1986); Cohen, "Teaching Practice: Plus ca Change. . . ";David Cohen, "Educational Technology and School Organization," in Raymond Nickerson and Philip Zodhiates, eds., *Technology in Education: Looking Toward 2020* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1988). See also Charles Piller and Liza Weiman, "America's Computer Ghetto," *New York Times,* 2 August 1992.

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It was Monday, the first week of November. The grape season was over and I could now go to school. I woke up early that morning and lay in bed, looking at the stars and savoring the thought of not going to work and of starting sixth grade for the first time that year. Since I could not sleep, I decided to get up and join Papa and Roberto at breakfast. I sat at the table across from Roberto, but I kept my head down. I did not want to look up and face him. I knew he was sad. He was not going to school today. He was not going tomorrow, or next week, or next month. He would not go until the cotton season was over, and that was sometime in February. I rubbed my hands together and watched the dry, acid stained skin fall to the floor in little rolls. . . . Two hours later, around eight o'clock, I stood by the side of the road waiting for school bus number twenty. When it arrived I climbed in. Everyone was busy either talking or yelling. I sat in an empty seat in the back.

When the bus stopped in front of the school, I felt very nervous. I looked out the bus window and saw boys and girls carrying books under their arms. I put my hands in my pant pockets and walked to the principal's office. When I entered I heard a woman's voice say: "May I help you?" I was startled. I had not heard English for months. For a few seconds I remained speechless. I looked at the lady who waited for an answer. My first instinct was to answer her in Spanish, but I held back. Finally, after struggling for English words, I managed to tell her that I wanted to enroll in the sixth grade.

Francisco Jimenez
"The Circuit," *America Street*
Anne Mazer, ed., Persea Books, New York

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Kim Marshall

Teachers and Schools—What Makes a Difference: A Principal's Perspective

I HAVE BEEN WORKING AS A TEACHER, central office administrator, and principal in the Boston Public Schools for twenty-two years. The challenges are immense, and my colleagues and I have to fight off pessimism and despair every day. At their best, teachers and schools can and do make a difference. With the right ingredients, they can and do change children's lives for the better. But we are in an uphill battle, and our national and local leaders have not been providing the kind of blueprint that we need for education to have its full impact. We need to be part of a nationwide strategy to address issues of poverty, health care, housing, and racial antagonism.

Yet there is still much that can be done in education, especially at the level of the individual school. This aspect of being a teacher and a principal attracted me from the beginning: one can have a significant impact even if the world outside seems to be falling apart.

"Making a difference" has a particular meaning in this article. In the usual sense, all schools make a difference. Most children learn to read, write, and compute, and an increasing percentage graduate from high school and go on to productive work or higher education. But in recent decades, the challenge of educating the least advantaged students has become increasingly difficult because the culture of poverty is so much more stubborn, because the basic requirements for work and higher education are so much greater, and because we no longer have a safety net of low-skill jobs for those who drop out of school. I believe that effective schools are those that find ways of educating *all* their students.

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This standard of educational effectiveness focuses attention on what schools do for the disadvantaged student—not just the poor, but also the dyslexic, the rebellious, and the unconventional learner. For these children, the role of the school is a matter of life and death. For children who enter schools prepared to learn (their parents have been reading to them, teaching them their letters, plunking them down in front of Sesame Street, taking them to museums), school makes a difference, but not this kind of difference. Ready-to-learn children can survive teachers who are less than stellar, classroom experiences that are less than inspirational, and schools that are less than excellent. To an alarming degree, those who come to school with an empty stomach, weak family support, negative peer pressures, low self-esteem, and inadequate prerequisite skills are those who fall into a chronic pattern of school failure and drop out before high school graduation—with devastating long-term consequences. Is this inevitable? Is it hopelessly idealistic to think that schools can educate all children?

There *is* a powerful tendency for schools to favor those who are ready to learn and push out those who are not. Traditionally-structured schools are rigged against the disadvantaged to such a degree that we can predict school failure as early as first grade. Yet there are teachers and schools who have been successful in bringing a more equitable distribution of educational results—without harming their more advantaged students. Research and anecdotal accounts have documented this fact. In these effective schools, the rising tide raises all boats. Those who entered school more advantaged will probably leave with their masts higher than those of their less advantaged classmates. But the difference with effective schools is that the keels of all boats clear the rocky bottom. There is basic equity in the delivery of the skills and knowledge necessary for all children to succeed as they make their way through school—and in the open sea beyond. This ideal of effective schooling is challenging and elusive, but pursuing it is a moral imperative.

SCHOOLS—WHAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

In my nine years as a classroom teacher, my focus was almost entirely on my classroom. I operated on the assumption that my students had learned little before they came to me, and I saw my Herculean

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challenge as teaching them as though they would never again have an effective teacher. (If this sounds quixotic, keep in mind that I came of age in the 1960s.) I was lucky to have a principal who left me alone, and I operated with almost complete autonomy, ignoring whole chunks of the city's curriculum and the occasional instructional guidelines that the central office found the time to send us during Boston's desegregation crises. As long as my classroom was reasonably quiet and parents didn't complain, I was free to do what I wanted.

Then, in the late 1970s, I read the new "school effectiveness" research pioneered by George Weber[1] and Ronald Edmonds.[2] I also read *Fifteen Thousand Hours,* a British study by Michael Rutter and his colleagues.[3] These researchers located and described urban public schools that went counter to the general trend of substandard education. They analyzed the schools that were successful for all students, even the poorest and lowest-achieving, and identified a set of factors that these schools had in common. Edmonds's list included: a strong principal, high expectations, a safe and humane climate, a focus on basic skills, and the instructional use of test data. The correlates of success from other studies were surprisingly consistent. The research was especially welcome in contrast to the depressing studies of the 1970s, which seemed to say that schools did not make a difference for children.[4]

As I read the effective schools research, a new consciousness dawned. The notion that there might be an impact beyond the heroic teacher—that the school as a whole might operate as a coherent unit and have a collective impact on its students over time—was revolutionary to me. I realized that good teaching, although it is the wellspring of all lasting effects on students, is not enough. If teachers, even superstar teachers, work in isolation (as they usually do), most of their impact on students will be dissipated over time. I saw that for teachers to make a real difference, they have to be part of a *schoolwide* effort. For a school to be effective, it has to be more than a collection of good teachers; it has to be a team effort.

The new research also made me see for the first time the key role of the principal in leading the staff and shaping an environment in which teachers can do their best work, and this led to a job change. I went to graduate school to get the necessary certification, and after a six-year detour working in the central office, I finally became principal of the Mather Elementary School in Boston's Dorchester area, where I am now in my sixth year.

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Although I am immersed in the day-to-day challenges of running a school, the research on effective schools continues to intrigue, challenge, and guide me. What follows is a synthesis, based on my reading and personal experience, of the characteristics of effective schools and some thoughts on the process for making them come to life in the real world.

Effective Schools Must Have Instructional Leadership

A humbling thought for principals is that we do not do the actual work of a school; that is what teachers do in their classrooms. Because principals are spread so thin and are chronically tied up in administrative tasks, teachers are without supervision 99 percent of the time, working with children in ways that make sense to them from their training, experience, values, and the cultural norms of the school. The principal's effect on instruction is quite indirect, and most "leaders" have a limited impact on the culture and basic functions of a school in their years in a building.

The traditional model of the principal is to take care of the discipline, handle administrative matters, and leave teachers alone. Many elementary teachers, content in their self-contained classrooms, are understandably wary of principals trying to assert themselves as instructional leaders. Some small schools have even tried to go back to a variation of the original model of early American schoolhouses, doing without a principal and distributing the administrative and disciplinary tasks among a newly-empowered teaching staff.

So, is "instructional leadership" an unneeded and unwanted intrusion on the professional autonomy that teachers need to work their magic with students? It certainly can be if it is done badly, but the research indicates that a deft and well-trained instructional leader is the key to providing support to teachers, breaking the isolation so common in elementary classrooms, and enhancing teachers' long-range impact on their students.

Instructional leadership varies from principal to principal and from school to school. I will sketch the ways in which I have tried to lead the Mather School over the last five years.

First and foremost, I try to communicate that teaching and learning come first. There are so many other things going on in schools (attendance reports, records that have to be filled out, lunch cards, union business, keeping students out of trouble, staff gossip,

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etc.) that it takes a tenacious effort to keep instruction first. Perhaps the most eloquent statement a principal can make about the primacy of instruction is what he or she *doesn't* do. Schoolwide announcements on the public address system are the bane of teachers' existence ("Will the owner of a blue Toyota, license plate MDM-761 please move your car. It is blocking . . . "). In addition to snapping every train of thought in classrooms throughout the school, such announcements (which happen two or three times every period in many schools) carry another message to teachers: What you are doing in your classrooms is less important than what we have to announce. In the office at our school, there is a hard and fast rule against making all-call announcements; I carry a beeper so I can be located easily, and if we need to find someone, we simply do the legwork.

Another key aspect of instructional leadership is getting things that make teachers' work with children easier and more effective. This includes supplies and materials, computers for classrooms, reliable substitute teachers when teachers are out sick or at workshops; it also means assuring an orderly, safe, and clean environment, social workers to counsel troubled students, student teachers and tutor/mentors from local universities and businesses, and much more. Sometimes teachers haven't requested or even thought of the things that I bring into the school, but more often I'm responding to requests that arrive with increasing frequency. I make a point of being highly visible around the school, trying (not always successfully) to visit each of the forty classrooms every day. Being around the school is critical to being an "askable" principal, and sometimes one pass is not enough. I once walked down a corridor four times within a few minutes before a teacher came out and said, "By the way, Mr. Marshall, could I possibly have. . . . "

Another way for a principal to be an instructional leader and at the same time create greater credibility and kinship with teachers is to do some actual classroom teaching. Given the constant demands on a principal's time, this is extremely difficult, but two years ago, I began teaching each fifth-grade class an extended unit on a subject I was trained in years ago: sex education. It has the advantage of being a topic that no teacher wanted to touch but that all agreed was important to students. Teaching the course has been an important part of establishing my bona fides as an elementary educator.

Another aspect of instructional leadership is spotting good programs and finding ways of bringing them into the school. For example, three years ago, I began hearing about a program called

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Reading Recovery. Originally from New Zealand, it is designed to boost the reading achievement of first graders who are having trouble learning to read by means of intensive, daily, one-on-one assistance from highly-trained teachers over a three-month period. I got the support of my boss, went to a conference in Ohio, talked it up in the staff, and found two teachers in the school who were interested in going through the incredibly rigorous year of training. The program is now firmly established and having a very positive impact on a number of students each year.

A different kind of instructional leadership is packaging ideas from the staff into a program that can win outside funding. Several years ago, our long-range planning group identified four seemingly unrelated problems: the school had no gym; we were unable to keep students after school for detention because some students had to catch buses and it would be unfair to keep only the walkers; students had hardly any field trips to the many cultural sites in the Boston area; and there was no after-school program for students who desperately needed more attention and an academic boost. Our committee packaged these needs into the "Mathermobile," a four-day-a-week bus, funded by a special state grant, that does quadruple duty ferrying students to a neighborhood gym, taking students on field trips, and taking home detention students and after-school program students late in the afternoon.

Another area of leadership is raising money for worthwhile projects. I spend a lot of time identifying needs and writing grants, and some of my most satisfying moments as principal have been getting the news that we won a grant to implement a new program that would not otherwise have been possible. Our students sell a prodigious amount of candy twice a year (with only token resistance from the cavity-fighting lobby), and we put the money into a wide range of activities, including teacher workshops, curriculum materials, new equipment, and field trips. We have won a corporate partner for the school (The New England, a national life insurance company), and it provides a budget for things like photographs and pizza parties for classes with perfect attendance, teacher workshops, classroom sets of newspapers and magazines, and parent involvement.

Sharing important research and practical wisdom with teachers is another key leadership activity. Every day I write and distribute the "Mather Memo" to the entire staff. It includes items like the time of a fire drill, a reminder about a good workshop, and a report on a

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parent meeting the night before. Most days I squeeze in a brief professional clipping on the back of the memo. Clippings have included a teacher's account of dealing with a difficult student, a research report on the use of calculators in math classes, an opinion piece on the proposed national test by Albert Shanker (president of the American Federation of Teachers), and an article on Deborah Tannen's theory about differences in men's and women's communication styles. I keep the clippings short enough so that most of the staff read virtually all the clippings. These short articles stimulate many teachers to read more on their own. We subscribe to thirty teacher magazines and newsletters, and they are all available in a curriculum center that also contains a small professional library and other equipment for copying and making classroom materials.

I also encourage teachers to attend courses and workshops outside the school. Teachers come back with fresh energy, new ideas, and a sense that we're not the only ones facing challenging problems. Last year, three-quarters of the staff went to outside workshops, averaging four per teacher, for an astonishing total of 125 days of training.

Instructional leadership also means bringing in good speakers for staff meetings. Recent topics have included multicultural education, cooperative learning, violence prevention, sexual abuse prevention, dealing with death, and hands-on science and math techniques. Even better than outside speakers has been organizing our own teachers to give workshops themselves. Few teachers will do this kind of thing on their own—there is a cultural norm in most schools against being seen as boasting to colleagues about one's own classroom innovations—and it takes a principal to provide an acceptable forum if they are to feel comfortable sharing effective practices.

An effective principal must also work on building a positive and caring environment and school culture. The Mather Memo is an important vehicle: staff birthdays are noted, staff members are praised for special contributions and projects, and every Friday there is a cartoon. Students' birthdays are also noted, so that they will receive greetings from adults who know him or her throughout the day. I go around each day with specially-inscribed birthday pencils ("Happy birthday from Mr. Marshall and the Mather School Staff") and present one to each student and staff member on their special day, which is a surprisingly big deal even for streetwise fifth graders ("Mr. Marshall, don't forget my birthday is tomorrow!"). There are other ways to build positive school culture: an annual faculty talent show (in which we all make fools of ourselves

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to the great delight of students), regular celebrations and parties, and other rituals like dressing up at Halloween and Secret Santa at Christmas.

This is all part of breaking the isolation of elementary teachers in their classrooms. Principals need to forge a sense of common purpose and give teachers a sense of being part of a larger enterprise than the all-consuming work with the children in front of them. My incomplete efforts in this area include organizing a weekly 15-minute assembly for the school (in which we sing the school song, watch a 5-minute presentation by a different homeroom each week, and listen to a brief message by the principal). I hold regular meetings with grade-level teams of teachers, get teams to meet with the teachers above and below their level to compare notes on curriculum, send teachers off to conferences together, and tackle thorny issues like student discipline and staff-race relations in all-staff discussions.

Another vital piece is making the right interventions on student discipline. Our most important meeting as a staff was holding a full-day meeting in which we achieved consensus on four categories of student misbehavior—taboos, serious problems, no-no's, and uh-uh's—and what would happen if students broke the rules. More recently, the staff took the initiative in reshaping our morning entry and afternoon dismissal procedures; major improvements were made in both areas.

I work hard to create a positive set of relationships with parents, based on the belief that students will do better work if they sense that their parents and teachers—the most important adults in their lives—are on the same wavelength. This has meant overcoming mutual distrust and misunderstanding and being sure that parents always feel welcome in the building. Teachers have been more than a little suspicious of my basic orientation—that parents are our clients, we work for them, and they must always be treated with respect, even when they are strident. I am careful to support teachers publicly with the occasionally angry parent, and gradually I have won most teachers' trust. The clincher is that virtually all parents have a very high opinion of the school, feel we are there for their children, and support our efforts.

Missing from this list is what might seem the most obvious aspect of instructional leadership: supervision and evaluation of teachers. It is the aspect of my principalship about which I feel least satisfied, but I have recently been relieved of some of my guilt by reading that W. Edwards Deming, the American management guru, does not believe in the efficacy of traditional personnel reviews. My own experience

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leads me to agree wholeheartedly with what Mike Schmoker, a research analyst, has written:

> Evaluation has become a polite, if near-meaningless matter between a beleaguered principal and a nervous teacher. Research has finally told us what many of us suspected all along: that conventional evaluation, the kind the overwhelming majority of American teachers undergo, does not have any measurable impact on the quality of student learning. In most cases, it is a waste of time.[5]

One of my major complaints with our central office is the evaluation process we are required to use and the impossibly large number of teachers we must evaluate each year—forty-one in my case. The most meaningful feedback I give teachers is in brief, informal comments on lessons or interactions I've seen in my travels around the school. Very little of substance comes through the formal evaluation process, despite the enormous amount of time and anxiety it takes. As an alternative, I am most intrigued with the idea of videotaping teachers and sitting together watching the tape and sharing ideas on how the lesson went. I have tried this only a few times, but it is a powerful process; the camera holds up an unwavering mirror to teachers, and students are remarkably unfazed by the camera's presence.

Being a highly visible and available principal makes one thing virtually inevitable: no paperwork will get done during the day. All that is shunted to the late afternoon and evening, and is the main reason why I work a 78-hour week when school is in session. I recently had an intern follow me around for a day, and he recorded two hundred separate interactions with staff members and students in 7 hours (and this did not include scores of "Hello's" to students in passing). While this figure is far short of the one thousand interactions most teachers have each day,[6] a principal's day is more fragmented, unpredictable, and difficult to control. The action is relentless, and it is a constant struggle to keep the instructional leadership agenda from being swamped by all the random events that conspire to gobble up my time. Yet all these other events are part of the job too—a student with a splinter in her finger, an unexpected delivery of twenty heavy boxes by a truck driver with a bad back, a jam in the Xerox machine that threatens to bring the school to a grinding halt. I have to keep reminding myself that each event is a small opportunity to build a positive climate, support a teacher, strengthen a relationship, and perhaps relieve someone's pain (getting that splinter out without too many tears). The essence of instructional

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leadership is being cheerfully available to do just about anything and still keeping the overall game plan.

Effective Schools Must Have a Clear and Focused Mission

The need for a schoolwide focus on basic skills and learning outcomes has been common to almost all the effective schools studies, which in turn echo the corporate literature on excellence. For a school to be successful, it must have a set of shared beliefs that creates a constant drive for improvement and maximizes the use of time and resources.

The evolution of our mission statement at the Mather School is an interesting case study. Over the last few years, we have gone through several stages. We have been driven by external pressures to raise our standardized test scores and attract more parents to the school (Boston has a "controlled choice" student assignment plan in which parents choose schools within racial guidelines). But in an attempt to focus on the more important underlying effectiveness of the school, we developed long-range planning goals focused on students' reading and math skills, their "cultural literacy," boosting the achievement of "at-risk" students, supporting teachers, and getting parents involved in their children's learning. These goals helped us write proposals and get funding for a wide variety of projects.

Building on these goals, we came up with a series of slogans and value statements to describe our purpose, including: "America's oldest public elementary school"; "We can touch the world"; "All children can learn"; "Hands-on experiences teach best"; "Cultural literacy and the arts are basic"; "A safe, caring community focused on learning." With these statements plastered all over the school, I assumed that we had a clearly defined sense of mission and purpose. So did most staff members. In each end-of-the-year questionnaire for the last five years, the staff has been very positive on the following question. For example, last June, in response to, "Do you think the Mather School has a clear sense of purpose and mission?," 76 percent said yes and only 24 percent said no.

But in last June's questionnaire, I added a follow-up question asking the staff to *describe* that mission. Only fifteen of the forty staff members who filled out the questionnaire were willing to write anything, and they gave fifteen different answers! This total lack of unanimity was dramatic evidence that I had failed to build a consensus around a common mission. It was clear that our goals and slogans did not meet the basic standards of a good mission statement,

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which should: capture the central vision of the school; focus on outcomes; be short and memorable; and be known and believed by the entire staff.

I came into the 1992–1993 school year determined to forge a true consensus on the mission of the school. In presenting the challenge to the staff in early September, I first asked, Why bother? Couldn't we muddle through without one? I answered my own question by asserting that without a clear mission, we would not make a real difference for our students or improve our chronically mediocre morale. If our students were to succeed against the daunting odds that face them, we must work as a unified team. I argued that a sense of purpose and direction was also a vital ingredient in good morale. Without an ambitious goal, a school can come to see itself as warehousing children, baby-sitting and entertaining them for lives that will not matter, which will guarantee mediocre outcomes and prevent the adults from being happy and productive professionals. "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

To write a mission statement with real meaning, we had to define a vision for students and we needed to face up to our greatest fears. For an inner-city elementary school, the most idealistic vision is that we will help students break the bonds of poverty, enter the mainstream, and lead happy and productive lives. Our greatest fear is that even our best efforts will not be enough to help students overcome poverty, dysfunctional families, teenage pregnancy, AIDS, racism, violence, and educational mediocrity in their teenage years. A good mission statement lies somewhere between the idealistic vision and these daunting fears. As an elementary school, what can we realistically do for our students? What is an attainable goal—something we can strive for without overpromising or promising too little?

The idea for the first draft of the Mather Mission came from one of the fifteen responses to last June's questionnaire. A teacher wrote that we should "respect, care for, and educate each child." This eloquent, practical, yet idealistic statement served as our starting point. I put in an additional element: what we can and must do in an elementary school is get students ready to be successful at the next level. This is an incremental approach to the eventual vision, and it focuses on what we know we can do well if we focus on it. The impetus for this second ingredient came from the corporate literature on Total Quality Management, which brings a refreshing perspective to school improvement efforts—a focus on serving one's customers. W. Edwards Deming, the American management genius who is credited with scripting the postwar Japanese economic miracle,

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speaks of the need for *constant improvements in producing what the customer wants and needs.*[7] Who are a school's customers? Students and parents are customers, to be sure. So are local employers. And what do these customers want? They might all agree on one thing: that children grow up to lead happy and productive lives.

But this desire is rather remote from the day-to-day running of an elementary school. What is a more concrete, immediate customer need that can guide the staff? The indispensable next step for an elementary school student is being successful in middle school. Without that, students won't go on to high school, get a diploma, and go to college or a good entry-level job—and in today's world, that means their chances of leading a happy and productive life are slim. So the most immediate goal in serving our students is preparing them to be successful in middle school.

Thinking of our mission in these terms has immediate and refreshing implications for an elementary school staff. Rather than swimming around in vague goals and slogans or worrying too much about test scores or other easily-distorted indicators of success, it got us thinking about the kind of graduate we want to produce—a graduate who will do well in any middle school and have a good chance of progressing toward the ultimate life goals.

In meetings at the beginning of this school year, and in drafts sent back and forth for one revision after another, our staff hammered out and agreed unanimously on a greatly-improved mission statement, backed up by a set of core values and a specific list of school outcomes we believe are needed for success in middle school. The Mather Mission is now: To respect, nurture, and educate all our students so they can confidently and successfully take the next step in their lives.

The three core values are now: *1)* How we work as a staff. The Mather School is a safe and caring community of learners. Relationships within the school, and between home and school, are marked by mutual respect and trust, teamwork and creativity, and a continuous quest for better and better ways to help all students learn and grow. *2)* How we think children learn best. Our philosophy of teaching and learning can be summed up as: WHAM!—*W*hole language, *H*ands-on, *A*ctive, cooperative learning with *M*ulticultural content. *3)* What we want our graduates to know. To succeed in middle and high school, and to have access to higher education and the jobs of the next century, Mather students need the following skills and attributes (which we call "Twenty-one Keys to the Twenty-First Century"): *1)* Basic skills—really solid competence in reading, writ-

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ing, and math; *2)* Basic knowledge—key facts and concepts in history, geography, science, and current events; *3)* A love of reading—genuine interest in reading for learning and enjoyment; *4)* Critical thinking—being able to form opinions and think independently; *5)* Study skills—being able to get organized, take notes, use a library, and get information; *6)* Verbal skills—being able to express ideas, opinions, or findings to an audience; *7)* Creative expression—appreciating the arts and one's own creative potential; *8)* Computer literacy—using computers for word processing and other applications; *9)* Health and fitness—taking care of one's body through exercise, nutrition, sleep, etc.; *10)* Self-discipline—being able to work independently and take responsibility; *11)* Efficacy—believing that effort will produce results, that one can "get smart" through hard work; *12)* Self-knowledge—knowing one's strengths and weaknesses; *13)* Self-esteem—being confident in one's abilities and accomplishments; *14)* Cultural pride—identifying positively with one's own origins; *15)* Respect for diversity—understanding and appreciating racial/ethnic, male/female differences; *16)* Cooperation—being able to work harmoniously with others; *17)* Problem-solving—being able to solve problems and resolve conflicts using effective strategies; *18)* Teen survival skills—knowing the basic facts about drugs, alcohol, sex, AIDS, and violence; *19)* Assertiveness—being able to say NO to harmful pressures and stand up for one's rights; *20)* Mentors—knowing and drawing on positive adult role models for guidance and support; *21)* The golden rule—a disposition to treat others as one wants to be treated.

The implications of these graduation goals for the school are clear. Because the fifth grade teachers clearly can't accomplish this list by themselves, there has to be a coherent K-5 curriculum with each grade handing off solid achievements to the next so that students move toward the eventual goals. In this sense, every grade level's teachers are the preceding grade's customers: kindergarten teachers should be working to improve what they pass along to first grade teachers, first grade to second grade, and so on.

Thinking in terms of preparing students for middle school also leaves room for activities that would not fit into a more narrowly defined mission. For example, one of the most important contributions a school can make is to give students the knowledge and assertiveness skills to avoid sexual abuse in their lives—or, if they have been abused, giving them counseling to begin to repair the

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damage. This would not be part of our mission if we were focused primarily on raising test scores, but it does serve the mission of maximizing children's chances of taking the next step toward a happy and fulfilled life.

Another advantage of this mission statement is that progress can be measured. Through our school department's excellent data system, we can track the basic achievement (including grades, attendance, and discipline information) of every student still in the city's public schools. Thus, we can measure our long-range impact, controlling for how many years each student actually spent at the Mather, giving ourselves credit where we have been successful and trying to adjust our program where we see failures.

All this lies ahead. What we have done so far is clarify the vision and set some very ambitious goals. We now have a great deal of work in making the mission statement come to life.

The Mather's story is just one example of shaping a mission statement to specific circumstances and needs. Each school must find its own mission through a similar process of discussion, trial, and error, taking care to involve all constituencies. Some schools may want to adopt a package from outside, and there are several on the educational marketplace: James Comer's School Improvement model from New Haven; Henry Levin's Accelerated Schools program from Stanford; cooperative learning or whole language as a schoolwide focus; the Child Development Program from San Ramon, California; and others. Each of these school improvement packages is a complex set of interventions under the umbrella of a few simple principles. The important thing is that the entire school community buy into the model that is adopted, that the model is intelligently adapted to local conditions, that it is really brought to life throughout the school, and that it is constantly refreshed and revitalized.

An Effective School Must Have High Expectations of All Students

There must be a pervasive belief among the staff that all children can and will learn. Why is it necessary to assert something that seems so obvious? Because the forces that produce low expectations are so powerful. There are many subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which low expectations are communicated to students. Because children are extremely sensitive to what adults think of their abilities, these beliefs are self-fulfilling. Some teachers buy into a Darwinian fatalism about student achievement: *single-parent families; mothers don't read to them; no museum trips; we have them only five hours a day; there's no way these kids can catch up. What can you do?*

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In many classrooms, this process goes on day after day; teachers get bogged down in discipline struggles, and expectations sink. It is impossible for teachers to be creative and hopeful under such conditions. The result is an embattled, cynical attitude, and constant complaining. Some teachers are actually angry at students for coming to school so unready to learn, and angrier at their parents for not acting like middle-class people and not coming to parent conferences. Underlying these feelings is the belief that it is the responsibility of children and their families to adjust to the expectations of the school.

Teachers who have *high* expectations accept students and their families as they are (One of my colleagues says, "Parents send us the best students they have.") and project a serene, sometimes irrational confidence that an effective classroom and school can and will overcome entering disadvantages. These teachers believe that hard work, not innate ability or family background, is the key. They are willing to adapt the classroom to fit the child rather than demanding that the child and family conform to the school.

The principal is a key person in keeping expectations high. Individual teachers may believe their students can learn, but the pressures to lower expectations are so powerful that the principal must constantly remind the entire school community of its beliefs. This can take the form of signs on the walls, a school creed recited at assemblies, a school song with this belief in the lyrics, giving teachers articles that reinforce the importance of high expectations and how to implement them, and visiting speakers who drive the message home.

The most important manifestation of a school's expectations is the curriculum content taught at each grade level. There has to be agreement on specific, attainable, appropriately challenging curriculum goals for each level, with exemplars showing what students are expected to accomplish and enlightened assessments to hold them accountable. Teachers should have the flexibility to come up with the best methods and materials to help students reach the goals.

A demanding curriculum is important, but it is possible to take things too far. One of the most unfortunate developments in the 1970s and early 1980s was the way many primary-grade educators, in the name of high expectations, moved first-grade curriculum objectives down into kindergarten, forcing students to learn (or parrot) things for which they were not developmentally ready, and in the process making school into an unpleasant, failure-producing chore for those children who could least afford to bear that burden.

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But the more common tendency is the opposite: watering down the curriculum for students who are not doing well—or for whole schools with disadvantaged, low-achieving students. It is difficult for teachers to swim against the tide when many students are extremely frustrated and actively resist the grade-level curriculum by refusing to do the work or acting out when difficult work is presented. The path of least resistance, similar to the unspoken "deal" Ted Sizer has described between high school teachers and their students *(If you don't push us to work too hard, we won't misbehave),*[8] is to give students easier work: fill-in-the-blank worksheets, fun puzzles, games, loosely-structured class discussions, and other low-level activities that nibble around the edges of the curriculum but are not the rigorous reading, writing, problem-solving, and thinking that is needed to pull students up to grade-level standards. Not that learning can't be fun and involving, but it has to be focused on appropriate objectives if students are to achieve.

A vital ingredient in shaping and implementing appropriate expectations is a regular forum for teachers to share successful practices. Goals that can seem out of reach at first blush can be implemented when there are opportunities for teachers to share ideas. When the Boston schools launched a new reading/language arts curriculum in 1982 that called for kindergarten students to know left from right, I recall one kindergarten teacher strenuously objecting. She said that it was too hard, impossible to attain, cruel to the students, and simply crazy. Another teacher quietly held up her left hand with the thumb pointed out at right angles, and said this is how she had been teaching her kindergarten students to remember left from right; see how the hand looks like the letter L? Stunned silence. The first teacher had suddenly found a way to teach the "impossible" objective. There needs to be a lot of this kind of sharing if a rigorous, appropriate curriculum is to be taught effectively to all children. Teachers are the best resource for professional development.

Maintaining high expectations requires a stubborn, deep-seated belief in the educability of all children. Where do some teachers get such a belief system? It may come from the experience of having been sold short by teachers oneself. It may come from ideological conviction—from having been exposed to some of the great educators like Ron Edmonds who have preached this gospel. It may come from a planned experience (such as Jeff Howard's Efficacy Institute five-day seminar[9]) that brings about the "paradigm shift" from the concept of schools as sorting machines to a real belief that all children can learn. And it may come from being part of a schoolwide reform initiative

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specifically focused on raising expectations, such as Baltimore's "Success for All" program and Vermont's statewide program whose slogan is *Very high skills for every student, no exceptions, no excuses.*

One key activity in keeping expectations high is early identification of children at risk and aggressive efforts to get them help, including tutoring, mentoring, appropriate special education services, and other interventions to accelerate their learning and get them back on the track to success. As was mentioned above, our school has adopted the Reading Recovery program, and teachers are impressed to see the lowest-achieving first graders, students who could identify only a few letters of the alphabet and no common sight words, reading fluently in the middle range of their class after only twelve weeks of intensive one-on-one instruction. Nothing turns around negative expectations more than seeing supposedly hopeless students learn well.

Tracking (grouping homerooms by ability) and grade-level retention are two common ways in which low expectations are institutionalized in schools. There is ample evidence that both practices depress the achievement of at-risk students.[10] Principals have the power to eliminate tracking and greatly reduce retention, and this is an important intervention we can make. Separate special education classes are another way in which students can be prevented from achieving their full potential (although such programs are sometimes necessary to meet students' educational needs). Our school has begun to fully integrate emotionally-disturbed students from a previously self-contained class, with a special education teacher providing help and support to students and classroom teachers. The program is challenging and requires real dedication and extra work, but last year, nine out of ten students in the program made significant progress in regular classrooms and show signs of getting out of what had seemed an endless stay in separate special education classes. This shows how changed expectations (we just treated them like normal children), combined with a well-organized support system outside the classroom, can dramatically alter performance.

But it is not enough to preach high expectations, implement high curriculum standards and effective programs, and avoid tracking and retention. Students must be *taught* a belief system in which effort, not innate ability, is seen as the key to success. Carol Dweck of Columbia University has found that elementary school students who have a "born smart" belief system more often fall apart academically in middle school, even if they were successful up to that point, while students who have the "get smart" belief system are able to improve

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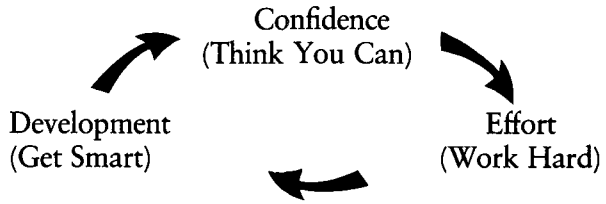
their school achievement.[11] Dweck believes that it is possible to shift students from one belief system to another, and student curriculums like that of Jeff Howard's Efficacy Institute are one vehicle. We have adopted the general philosophy implicit in Howard's work, and a sign posted all over the school reads:



Classroom changes include emphasizing mastery of specific subject matter and comparing students against their own performance, rather than that of others. It means treating errors and failures as an opportunity to improve performance. In our school, we recently adopted a new report card for the first and second grades that eliminates the traditional "F" for failure and substitutes a 1–4 scale in which 4 means "not yet." This is a powerful statement that the student hasn't met the standard but is expected to do so with more work.

We are also seeking to de-emphasize the use of extrinsic rewards. Elementary schools abound with lollipops, stickers, prizes, honor roll certificates, and, of course, letter grades that carry great weight for children and their parents. In addition to undermining the development of the "get smart" belief system, too much reliance on extrinsic rewards can also leave students without internal motivation—their own engine for self-improvement. Building in this internal gyroscope for hard work and self-improvement is a vital part of the job of the effective elementary school teacher. It has the most significant impact on students at the bottom of the heap, who tend to be the most dependent on extrinsic rewards.

Another way of fostering high expectations is the use of mastery learning in classrooms—something that usually has to be actively promoted by the principal or the central office. Mastery learning builds on the basic insight that unless students have prerequisite skills under their belt, they cannot be successful in the next unit in the curriculum. Unfortunately, most teachers don't apply this principle of learning: They present new curriculum material, give a test, record the grades (including a number of failures and near-failures), and move on to the next unit. Because much of what is learned in the elementary school curriculum builds on what has come before,

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students who don't master initial steps fall further and further behind, and few teachers have a systematic way to help them catch up. Even expensive remedial programs that pull students out of their regular classrooms for small-group instruction (such as Chapter I or special education) are usually disconnected from what is going on back in the classroom and do not use a reteaching approach for material that students have not mastered. The result is that students who do not learn well the first time around gradually slip out of the mainstream of school success and become increasingly frustrated, troubled, defiant, and disruptive. The smart get smarter while those who, for whatever reason, were behind coming in, are left in the dust.

Mastery learning breaks this cycle of failure: The teacher presents new material, gives a preliminary test, and then makes strenuous efforts to reteach the material to students who scored below a mastery level (80 percent), using different methods and materials the second time around. Students who did well in the initial lesson do enrichment work or provide peer tutoring for those who haven't understood. When teachers take the extra time to catch students' errors and misconceptions before they accumulate, a much greater percentage of students succeed. The best computer software for classrooms incorporates mastery learning, with systematic teaching of prerequisites, constant testing for mastery, and reteaching loops for those who don't master any step.

Mastery learning is fairly simple to use, and extensive research has proved that it is highly effective for low-achieving students.[12] Why, then, do so few teachers use it? Perhaps because it takes more time at first. Perhaps because of teachers' inertia in adopting a new approach. But I suspect that something more basic is at work here. Most teachers did reasonably well in school themselves, and have rarely experienced what it is like to fail and be left behind with a feeling of inadequacy and shame. Implicit in using mastery learning is *1)* a perceived obligation to help those students who didn't succeed the first time around; *2)* a belief that they can learn the material if it is taught again; and *3)* a commitment to finding different teaching methods and materials that will accomplish what the first round of teaching didn't. Many teachers don't accept these three assumptions. Having seldom needed second chances when they were students, they basically don't believe that their own students *deserve* them.

In short, they have not yet made a commitment to educating all their students. Underlying the conventional, failure-producing teach/test/move-along sequence is the belief that when students fail, it's their fault and they should accept the bad marks and still work hard

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to improve themselves. It's the student's obligation to learn. A teacher who uses mastery learning takes responsibility for finding another way to help a failing student learn, and builds in reteaching loops, as well as productive enrichment activities or peer tutoring opportunities for students who master the material the first time around.

Effective Schools Have a Positive Climate

In order to learn, students must feel *safe,* which means all staff members deal quickly and firmly with any threat from within or without. Students have to feel that the adults *care* about them, which means they are understanding, culturally sensitive, and available to get involved in students' lives beyond academics. Students have to feel part of a *community,* which means there are rituals and other symbolic ways to pull students and staff together, and students see their own culture and heritage celebrated and respected in schoolwide activities. And students have to feel there is one overall purpose to the enterprise: *learning.*

Many of the students who pose the greatest threat to safety—and who are most frequently the victims of violence and ridicule—are those whose self-esteem is the most damaged. Their behavior and performance are shaped by a series of negatives: I am ugly; I am stupid; I am bad; I am a loser.[13] Some reject the school's definition of what is good and build their self-esteem on negatives: I am the Terminator. People are afraid of me. I am *bad*! To be effective for these students—and for the school to be a safe and orderly community for everyone—schools must do more than enforce a code of discipline. There must be a "prosocial curriculum" that explicitly develops certain qualities in students starting in kindergarten. Here are some of the key lessons:[14]

Connectedness; feeling you belong. This includes schoolwide practices that pull students together: morning announcements; regular schoolwide assemblies featuring messages of inclusion and participation; schoolwide rituals and awards; stretching learning projects over time so students have a sense of being part of a long-term process that extends over days and weeks; a personalized, child-centered approach within classrooms that uses cooperative learning; and class meetings to resolve problems and share experiences.

Multicultural acceptance. All students need to know about their own racial/ethnic group, know the common culture of the United States, and learn about the culture and heritage of others, starting

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with the groups represented by children in the classroom and school. Given the current racial climate in the United States, mutual respect and acceptance across our racial and cultural divides is more important than ever, and it is a vital part of a school's prosocial curriculum.

Uniqueness and competence. The school should give many chances for students to experience success and accept and celebrate each individual's contributions. Praise for accomplishments large and small should be specific so that students have their distinctive qualities affirmed and understand why they are valued. Praise should come not just for getting the right answer but for fresh approaches and originality, which means asking open-ended questions with opportunities for divergent thinking; and downplaying judgmental reactions to students' errors. Wrong answers have to be treated respectfully and seen as opportunities to improve performance rather than signs of incompetence and failure.

Efficacy and independence; feeling you have control over your own life. Students need to believe that they are competent to do what they set out to do. This sense of efficacy does not develop in schools where the staff controls students' every move; it develops when teachers and administrators set clear limits and then increasingly involve students in making choices about learning and classroom organization, gradually empowering them to take responsibility for their own learning and conduct, and helping them develop self-direction and self-control. There is a lot of loose thinking about building students' self-esteem, and much of what passes for wisdom in this area is superficial cheerleading that does not have much impact. True self-esteem is based on actual accomplishments and a thoughtful integration of those achievements into a strong sense of competence and efficacy. There are no shortcuts to that.

Emulating models. The most powerful messages students receive are contained in the actions of the adults around them, which speak louder than words. Schools should be about the business of building character as well as competence; the best way to do this is for the adults to model ethical, tolerant, problem-solving behavior.

Another new strain of thought under the general rubric of school climate is the concept of the "full service school" or "one-stop shopping"—making the school building the site for a wide spectrum

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of medical, social, and psychological services. Children are coming to school with increasingly serious problems, and in most cases, the neediest children are not going to community health clinics for medical and other services. If such services are provided within schools, there is a much better chance that children and their families will receive them, and this in turn will prevent many of the consequences of untreated illnesses and problems. Children are a captive audience in schools, and there is a strong case for making schools the primary contact point for the delivery or referral of a wide range of services to children and their families.

Providing a broad range of services in school (as in the full-service school model) is probably the only way to meet the pressing needs of many students. Schools are at a great disadvantage trying to educate students who have excruciating toothaches, untreated medical problems, low self-esteem, and other social and psychological issues in their lives. Nor can teachers take on most of these issues alone. Only by addressing the whole range of issues in a coordinated fashion within one school building can real progress be made. But as this concept is piloted, one thing must be kept in mind: The ultimate purpose of the school is learning. All the other services are means to an end; they are there to help children and their teachers to concentrate even more effectively on teaching and learning.

A first step toward this model is the Student Support Team (SST) concept, which we have adopted in our school. A team composed of the principal, school nurse, special education administrator, counselors, two teachers, and an SST liaison meets every week to discuss the case of one student we're worried about. There is a detailed case conference, and the team decides what course of action is warranted: an immediate child-abuse report, counseling, family outreach, modifications in the classroom, or referral for special education services. The effect of the SST is to support teachers and pool valuable knowledge and expertise to give the right intervention to high-risk students before their problems become more serious.

Effective Schools Must Develop Collegiality and a Positive Staff Culture

This has been the most difficult challenge for me as principal, having inherited a school with a negative climate. Some of the original effective schools research *(Fifteen Thousand Hours)* speaks of the need for a positive "ethos" among staff members. This determines whether teachers emerge from the isolation of their classrooms and share an interpersonal harmony in support of student achievement.

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Judith Warren Little, an expert on school climate, has added depth to the thinking on school culture with her work on collegiality, which she describes as a school climate in which: "Teachers engage in frequent, concrete talk about teaching; Teachers are observed and critiqued on their teaching; Teachers design and plan teaching materials together; Teachers teach each other in various ways.[15]"

The Learning Gap by Harold Stevenson and James Stigler[16] documents the way in which Asian teachers work together. Japanese and Chinese teachers have almost half the school day free to meet with their colleagues. This schedule is possible not because the overall student/teacher ratio is higher but because each class has many more students than most American schools. Stevenson and Stigler note that Asian teachers do not spent their free periods in their classrooms, but congregate in a common teachers' room where their desks and materials are jammed in with those of their fellow teachers. Many of these daily collegial interactions are focused on crafting first-rate lessons that are polished and perfected from year to year. This is a far cry from the chronic isolation of most American teachers, and the contractual limits on principals being able to require teachers to meet with their colleagues (as is the case in our school system).

Michael Huberman of the University of Geneva in Switzerland has commented that the vision of teachers as part of one big happy family sitting around the faculty lounge discussing students and curriculum is extremely difficult to attain in American schools. He suggests that a more attainable—and meaningful—form of collegiality in elementary schools occurs when teachers at the same grade level (or contiguous clusters of grades in small schools) work together as a team around shared curriculum units, materials, and goals. Huberman has pointed the way to an important first step toward the eventual goal of schoolwide teamwork.

Such small-scale teamwork does not usually happen by accident. The principal's role in nurturing a positive staff culture and creating conditions that make it possible is vital, for example, scheduling teachers at the same grade level so their free periods coincide and they can meet together. There are other ways for principals to foster a positive staff ethos. Jon Saphier and Matthew King have described the characteristics of a strong school culture, including experimentation, trust and confidence, appreciation and recognition, celebration and humor, involvement in decision making, school traditions, and honest and open communication.[17] Building a positive school ethos

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takes time, sensitivity, and strategic interventions. Principals who are successful are part cheerleaders, part coaches, part researchers, part therapists, and part parent figures. It is an art I'm just beginning to master after five years on the job.

Effective Schools Must Constantly Monitor Student Progress

Another common thread in studies of effective schools is the regular and frequent review of student progress. Effective schools check on how students are doing and put the assessment results to work to help students, modify instruction, and make curriculum decisions.

This does not mean bowing down at the altar of most existing standardized tests, which are notoriously open to distortion. The more high-stakes the test, the more it can lose its meaning through outright cheating (giving answers, teaching test items, or altering students' responses), borderline cheating (narrowing the curriculum to items covered by the test), and warping of the curriculum (spending large amounts of time on test preparation). Some schools that have been identified as "effective" may have boosted their test scores more than they boosted real student learning.

A perceptive *New York Times* article bolsters this point.[18] The reporter investigated two Brooklyn elementary schools, one with very high test scores, one with very low scores. By a variety of measures, the schools seemed quite similar (both had disadvantaged populations; both had African-American principals, both seemed to be well run), but the reporter found that the principal of the high-scoring school required every teacher to spend *one period a day for the entire year* on test preparation. The real question is whether the students in the low-scoring school really had lower skills and knowledge or whether they were merely less adept at taking this particular standardized test.

Michael Huberman wrote recently that "equating cognition with achievement scores is like equating a gourmet meal with caloric intake, or a Faberge egg with an egg."[19] He went on to say that putting all the emphasis on such scores renders 80 percent of what teachers do superfluous; computer-assisted instruction can easily teach almost everything that is measured by these tests.

Standardized test scores are the coin of the realm; they are what the public accepts as the "bottom line" of education. Yet an overemphasis on test scores can take up a great deal of instructional time and lead to serious distortion, sending schools off in the wrong direction. In devising our mission statement at the Mather School, for example, it has been a struggle to resist the pressures to make

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raising test scores the central objective of the school. The approach I have taken is to say that if we are doing a good job teaching, the test scores will take care of themselves. But we still give students a few days of test preparation just before the big tests each spring, just in case.

This is an area where educators need to do a better job educating the lay public about what test scores and other assessments mean—and don't mean. We need to distinguish between two types of tests: one that provides the public with comparative information on how the school is doing with respect to other schools and national norms; the second that actually helps teachers in their classrooms. The first kind should take minimal time away from instruction, and can be based on a random sampling of students. Politicians and the lay public will still demand a single number to measure school effectiveness, but the numbers educators release, as well as the information that gets used in daily instruction, can be based on much better data with much less impact on students' work time.

The second kind of test should provide teachers with information they can use to do a better job in their classrooms. Critics also worry about whether an overuse of this kind of test can distort the learning process. Donald Graves, who has done ground-breaking work in New Hampshire on teaching children to write, has likened the heavy use of pretests and posttests to pulling up a flower every day to see if it is growing. Most of the time, he says, we should be putting our energy into nurturing, not analyzing, the flowers as they grow.

Fortunately, there is a new current of thinking in the area of measuring student progress that combines teaching with assessment and offers a way out of these pitfalls. Quite abruptly, the traditional multiple-choice test has fallen into ill repute, and there is widespread agreement that a broader, more complete procedure must be used to assess students' progress—assessments involving portfolios of students' best work through the year, authentic performances in more true-to-life situations, multiple measures, and more ownership in the assessment process by teachers and principals. The new thinking is that students at each grade level should be able to see models of the kind of work they should be able to do at the end of the year, giving them a clear idea of what is expected and what they need to do to reach those goals.

If the job of assessment is to push curriculum in the right direction, these new ways of measuring achievement should get away from the distortions and problems of high-stakes standardized tests and too

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many little tests throughout the week. In this way, teachers can get the information they need to teach all their students well.

Effective Schools Must Work to Maximize Family Involvement

Perhaps the "softest" of the school effectiveness factors has been the role of the family in student achievement. There is no question that children learn best when parents and teachers share similar visions, when there is, in the words of Sarah Lawrence Lightfoot, an authority on parent involvement, a "sense of constancy" between home and school.[20] But many educators are fatalistic about the impact they can have on home variables, arguing that they are tied to socioeconomic status and not amenable to intervention by the schools.

The jury is still out on a lot of this research. While studies try to pinpoint the true "effectiveness factors" in working with families, schools will be left to follow their instincts on what makes the biggest difference and what is worth investing time in when you are already overwhelmed. I agree with Jon Saphier, a Boston-based researcher and trainer,[21] that the key variable is the family's overall sense of the school's quality. Saphier believes that the true effect of the elusive parent variable can be found in the answers to questions like these: Is this a good school? Does it have my child's best interests at heart? These basic beliefs determine whether parents tell their children, verbally or nonverbally, to put forth their best efforts every day. If the school succeeds in instilling positive beliefs in parents, then family involvement will be a productive part of making the school effective.

The means for getting to this point will vary from school to school and from community to community. Spaghetti dinners may work in one school, home outreach programs in another, newsletters in another, parent empowerment on a school-based management council in another, and a schoolwide read-to-your-family program in another. It is up to each principal and staff to work with parents to find the best ways to elicit productive parent involvement. But the most important ingredients are a respectful attitude toward families and a high-quality instructional program that meets the needs of all children. At the Mather School, we strive for this kind of respectful and client-oriented approach to parents. We also send home a letter to parents every week, supplemented by a list of specific tips on the back aimed at getting parents involved in helping their children learn. We have well-attended open-house meetings twice a year, and are experimenting with parent-outreach workers to make home visits and address parenting and other ways to support student achieve-

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ment. A significant contractual barrier to more meaningful parent contact is that there is no time for individual parent conferences. This is one of a number of areas where those who control the whole school system could help us do our jobs better.

HELP FROM OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL

"We're from the central office and we're here to help you improve your school." This might be one of the world's least believable statements to a school principal and staff interested in implementing an effective strategy. The fact is that, in many school systems, central office people and their mandates are more often associated with red tape, small-minded regulations, quick-fix interventions (such as a mandated reading textbook), and regulations that obstruct school-level initiatives. A conscientious principal might conclude (as a friend of mine recently did) that a major part of improving a school is "to build the moat deeper and the walls higher."

Having worked in our central office and shared a superintendent's vision of systemwide change, I believe there are specific actions that would truly enhance school improvement efforts, and they are:

Hire excellent principals. The single most important contribution anyone can make to school effectiveness is to appoint a first-rate leader. The state of the art for selecting and training principals is not fully developed, but there are some promising beginnings: The National Association of Secondary School Principals has developed the Assessment Center, which can serve as an effective initial screening of entry-level principals. Involvement of parents and staff is vital to a good match between possible candidates and the unique culture of each school. Principals have to be selected with the effective schools research in mind; it takes an unusual person to take on the much broader challenge of leading a school to educate all children.

Give principals more hiring power. Principals and school improvement teams should have considerably more power than they do to recruit and hire staff. Schools cannot and should not be held accountable for producing dramatically better student outcomes if they cannot put together a coherent team of professionals. An important part of increased hiring power is getting away from strict seniority in transfers within a school system. It is in everyone's best interests to have teachers working in an environment in which they

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are happy and supported. This, of course, is a hot collective bargaining issue that will not be easily achieved in most school systems.

Provide an enlightened and effective teacher evaluation instrument. Central can hinder staff collegiality and professional development by clinging to outdated teacher evaluation checklists. Developing and adopting a state-of-the-art instrument (and providing training for school-based personnel on its implementation) can make the principal's job much easier, and enhance efforts to move teachers in the right direction in terms of curriculum and instruction. The central office should also require teachers and principals to regularly and systematically keep up with the knowledge base and renew their craft knowledge and skill.

Give school staffs time to meet. In large unionized school systems with multitiered dismissal times, the simple process of having a weekly staff meeting becomes a contractual or scheduling impossibility. It is up to the central office to put first things first. Nothing is more important to supporting a school improvement effort and unifying a staff than having a regular weekly meeting, so central has to find a way to clear that time (perhaps with students leaving an hour early and teachers staying an hour late). Central should also provide schools with more extensive professional development time (a one-week August retreat for a whole staff, for example) when it is requested by a school improvement team.

Provide ample time for one-on-one parent-teacher conferences. Another item that has to be bargained with teacher unions is providing time for teachers to meet with parents about each child's progress. Biannual mass open-house meetings have a symbolic function but do not allow meaningful parent-teacher conferences. Real conferences (at least 20 minutes per parent) have to be scheduled before or after school, or during teachers' free periods, which means building this kind of time into teachers' contracts.

Provide resources with the minimum of red tape. Principals should not have to spend large amounts of time raising funds. Basic allocations from the central office should be generous in the area of curriculum materials, and should be readily accessible to school people, who should be able to deal directly with vendors and get the best deals and the best delivery times. Basic resources also include collective bargaining agreements about class size, which might in-

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clude smaller classes at the primary grade level to make possible effective teaching approaches in those grades.

Give schools more running room. Effective improvement efforts cannot be mandated or micromanaged from the central office. Having hired good principals, set the general direction, and provided support, the central office should get out of the way and monitor outcomes. Whether this takes the form of a formal school-based management initiative or a laissez-faire management strategy is unimportant; the key is for schools to feel some autonomy as they make key decisions—while at the same time understanding that they will be held accountable for getting results over time. Local autonomy should include the power to shape the budget. A radical version of this idea is the chartering of "entrepreneurial" schools being tested in Detroit and advocated in Boston by the Pioneer Institute.[22] The idea of being able to start a new school and staff it with like-minded teachers *and* get a prorated slice of the central budget is very appealing. It remains to be seen whether many schools will be able to get this degree of autonomy and this level of funding.

Cut down on standardized testing. High-stakes citywide testing programs have a negative effect on school programs, and often warp the curriculum and what happens in classrooms. The central office could do a great service to schools by opting for random-sampling tests in just a few grade levels to satisfy the public's legitimate need to compare achievement with nationwide norms. Central should also be in the forefront of promoting enlightened assessment that would push the curriculum in the right directions.

Don't micromanage the curriculum. An overly controlling, top-down curriculum—for example, a uniform textbook or a mandated method of instruction—does not allow schools enough room for creativity, and moves important decisions too far away from the classroom. A better approach is to set clear systemwide curriculum objectives and outcomes for each grade, provide an enlightened process for assessing student progress (i.e., authentic assessment versus standardized testing), and give teachers good consumer information on the best materials and programs for meeting those objectives. All other decisions on methods and materials should be made at the school level.

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Set good overall goals. Central can help school-based improvement efforts by giving a clear, enlightened set of the goals and outcomes for which schools will be held accountable. Outcomes should be focused on multiple criteria and not overemphasize test scores or other easily-manipulated measures. There should also be a realistic timetable (at least three years) to show results, so that schools will develop deeper strategies, not implement superficial remedies to get central off their backs.

Keep principals in place long enough to make a difference. The kind of change that is brought about by the heroic principal who rides into town and "turns around" a school in a year or two is superficial and will not stand the test of time. The central office should not move principals around like chess pieces. It takes at least five years to turn around an ailing school and ten years to have a deep impact on the culture of a school. Good principals need to be given support to sustain their enthusiasm over time.

Provide principals with support and good mentoring. Few principals can make all the judgments about problem analysis and strategy on their own; we need outside consultation to make key decisions, especially in the opening months of a school improvement effort, but also in the ongoing dramas that characterize any change process. Central can help link principals to experienced mentors and provide supportive supervision in critical times.

Help broker access to effective improvement packages. Principals and their staffs do not have the time to research and evaluate every one of the many school improvement packages and consultants that are available. Central curriculum and planning staff should act as consumer guides to the packages that are available and become available, put schools in touch with good consultants from universities and companies, and help school teams make intelligent choices that are best for their unique circumstances.

Broker social service agency help. It is hard for schools to make all the necessary connections to outside agencies. The central office can help by acting as a matchmaker to bring health clinics, counseling services, physicians, and other consultants to schools.

Serve as effective advocates for broader social issues. One of the biggest barriers to effective schooling is poverty. School boards and

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superintendents should be in the front lines of fighting for programs and funding to get at the root of major social problems, including poverty, poor housing, drugs, crime, the easy availability of handguns, homelessness, etc. These are tough, long-term issues, but school people have to feel there are advocates working on these problems and that there is hope somewhere over the horizon.

With these inputs from central, principals and school improvement teams can go to work. And this, of course, is just the beginning!

Beyond the district office, other layers of government and other institutions have a less direct but still significant impact on schools. It is not the purpose of this article to explore the broader policies and initiatives at the state, national, and university level, but I will mention a few areas that can make a difference: upgrading teacher professional certification; improving teacher preparation and selection; providing incentives for top-notch college graduates to go into teaching (Teach for America, national service, etc.); providing adequate funding for all schools and eliminating gross disparities in the funding to school systems; and making serious inroads on the problems of poverty, unemployment, child care, and health care.

CONCLUSION

The morale of public school educators has suffered in recent years because of our society's increasing poverty, worsening race relations, and a dearth of solutions from the nation's leaders. Those who educate the nation's children are in the front lines of addressing the human consequences of the disastrous economic and social policies of the last decade. While we have been working to make our schools better places for all students, the escalator we're climbing has been moving *down*. For all our efforts, there is a sense of losing ground, and that's profoundly discouraging. Without a clear road map on how we can make a difference, it is easy to begin blaming each other for the worsening problems we're seeing. I have felt this kind of disunity and finger-pointing in my own school.

In times like these, those who are working directly with children in schools have to steer a dangerous course between the Scylla of burnout and the Charybdis of cynicism. The problems our students face are so harrowing that dedicated professionals can begin to lose sleep over the infinite number of things left undone, the scores of problems unsolved, and needs unmet. There's the danger of working

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too hard, worrying too much, and burning out. Alternatively, there is the tug of giving up hope and beginning to treat education as just another job. This tug is especially strong in schools that lack effective leadership from the principal or superintendent—leadership that holds out hope and a vision of the importance of one's work and provides support to maintain this hope and vision.

The lack of national leadership on these issues has been deeply distressing. We know what needs to be done, but our elected leaders have not made it happen. Why is this true, when the solutions described here are so rational and obvious? My own sense is that deeply embedded in the national psyche is an acceptance of schools as a sorting mechanism, encouraged by those who espouse the notion that if students do not learn, it is their own fault.

So a change in national and local leadership attitudes is a first priority. We must commit ourselves to changing minds, or changing leaders, so that there is positive leadership around a more democratic, inclusive concept of education.

In the meantime, change happens one school at a time, and there is work to be done in the front lines. That will take great energy and commitment. How can people continue to work and believe when our students are dealing with such crushing problems? First, within each school, there must be a good overall strategy, worked out with colleagues. Second, we must be part of a team effort with colleagues who support each other's efforts. Finally, these individual efforts must be consonant with what research and good practical wisdom says will make a difference. To keep our sanity, and to be able to work effectively for our students, all three ingredients are necessary. With all three in place, hard work can make a difference for all children until the day the nation puts its house in order and comes to the aid of schools and children.

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Jerome M. Ziegler

Education: The Crucial Variable for Children?

The image of schooling for all has had a powerful hold on American political consciousness for more than a century and a half. Mass education has been the country's most important domestic social policy.

—Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir[1]

INTRODUCTION

THE QUOTATION AT THE HEAD of this essay is, I believe, an accurate reflection of the way most Americans feel about education. Schooling has had "a powerful hold" on their views about what society and government, at least state and local government, should do. Government should support the education, the schooling, of all children and youth, and in the half century since the end of World War II, a clear majority of our citizens have also come to believe that government should support the college education at least of those young persons in financial need. With respect to the education of children and youth, that "powerful hold" on our consciousness is coupled with a belief that proper schooling will enable them to become happy, useful, productive adults. So one might wonder why a question mark would be put at the end of the phrase which is the title of this essay.

The question mark asks us to reflect on whether education is a crucial variable or whether it is *the* crucial variable for children who

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are the subjects of the papers in this volume of *Dædalus*. If it is the crucial variable, what does that mean or imply? Are there other crucial variables? Is it a crucial variable for all children or only for some? Is it crucial at one particular time in their lives, for example, when they are commencing preschool, Head Start or kindergarten, or is schooling such a determining factor in children's growth and development throughout their childhood and adolescence that we regard it as crucial no matter how it "takes" with them or how they may be responding?

Education may be a crucial variable if other crucial variables are also present in the lives of young children such as good health and nutrition, decent housing, a safe neighborhood, and above all a loving, caring adult family, whether one person or two or more.[2] But we know that not all young children live in such favorable circumstances, and for those who do not, schooling is probably not nearly as important a factor in their lives as some would like it to be. In other words, if children belong to families where they are consistently loved and cared for, where their health and nutritional needs are properly served, in homes that do not disintegrate into emotional turmoil and disorganization, in neighborhoods that are safe, then those children can make the best use of whatever education is offered them in the preschool programs and schools they attend. If, however, they do not belong to such families, do not live in safe and secure housing and neighborhoods, they are unlikely to be able to take full advantage of their schooling. It is important to recognize that for many children living in these circumstances, however much their learning abilities are impaired by their home situation, the school may be the only safe and secure institution in their lives. It is, therefore, *crucial* to them, in all manner of ways. Anecdotal evidence from teachers is absolutely persuasive on this point.[3]

The word *crucial* means decisive; that implies, in my view, that other things are taken care of: proper health, decent home and neighborhood, a nurturing family. Education ought to be decisive in giving a child the intellectual and social skills needed for normal growth and development into the next stages of later childhood and adolescence. While aware of the wide range of behavior encompassed in the word "normal," I use it here in its commonsense meaning, that most would accept. Two factors are involved in the term crucial or decisive. First, children ought to come to school able and ready to

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learn. Second, schooling in the primary grades ought to give children what they need to be successful in the upper grades: competence in reading, writing, and numbers at the age-appropriate level; also, competence in beginning to understand how to learn more complex concepts and subjects, to develop that lively curiosity likely to motivate them to learn. This last point may be the most important.

THREE FACTORS IN THINKING ABOUT EDUCATION

What happens outside the school, what happens inside, and how they are related is what must concern us.

What Happens Outside the School

Readiness of children to learn is a concept both simple and complex. The experience of teachers provides conclusive evidence that many children who come from severely impoverished homes do not learn well. That, however, does not begin to explain the complex interplay of genetic and outside environmental factors in any individual child. It is exceedingly difficult to discern or assess these accurately or fully. Brain and motor development, emotional maturity, and degree of economic and social deprivation combine in very different ways in children, making it difficult for a teacher to understand an individual child's readiness to learn. School districts generally lack the resources to make individual diagnoses; teachers and administrators are compelled to fall back on generalizations about whole classes of children. These may well be grossly inaccurate for any particular child. Because teacher expectations can have a powerful effect on pupil performance, as numbers of classroom experiments have shown, and because such expectations are themselves conditioned by factors that are part of the social-economic culture and personal background of the teacher, it is difficult to institute reforms that ignore such phenomena.

The readiness of children to learn, related to nutrition and health, the income of families and homes, and the degree of family well-being,[4] makes all these crucial indicators, calling for close scrutiny. Most young children live in families in decent circumstances. Still, 20 percent of all children under six live in poverty; the rates are particularly high for African-American and Hispanic children. The conditions of such children, whether created by insufficient family income, racial discrimination, or single-parent circumstances, in

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central cities, suburbs, and rural areas are too well known to be rehearsed here.

The conditions of family disorganization and dysfunction, with their violence and discord, exacerbated by drug and substance abuse, result in the neglect and abuse of children on a massive scale. Recent census data, together with other studies, tell us poverty closely associates with a host of other factors that negatively affect children's readiness to learn. The level of the educational attainment of parent or parents, their employment status, and their health all operate to provide or deny opportunities to children.[5]

Since most people in the United States, according to the 1990 Census, now live in suburbs, and since most suburban families with young children are better off than the preponderant number of families living in central cities, the inner-city schools have a disproportionate number of children who are disadvantaged in their readiness to learn.[6] The problems of the inner-city elementary schools are different from those of many suburban schools, which is not to say that all suburban and rural families live in communities and have school systems that merit imitation. Nor is it true to say that inner-city families care less for their children than suburban and rural families, or that low income and single-parent families, wherever they live, are less concerned with their children than those who are financially secure, or where both parents are present. The social-economic conditions that contribute to readiness to learn among impoverished children, whether in the central districts of major metropolitan areas or in rural regions like Appalachia, must be addressed. Schools will not be able to resolve these problems by their own efforts alone.

It is not useful to say "All children will be ready to learn," and then develop neither policy nor program to address severe social and economic handicaps that affect great numbers of children. Schools have no control over the social-economic circumstances of families, homes, and neighborhoods; nor do they control their pupils' genetic inheritance. They are obliged to work with those who come to them. To the extent then that nonreadiness to learn (whatever its cause) contributes to school failure, which translates as pupil failure to progress at an acceptable rate, remedies will have to come from outside the school.

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The support that schools receive from their tax base, from their surrounding communities, and from the families of their students are all critical. Although segments of the adult population think a great deal about why education is crucial to children, many do not. Local school districts' budgets are often voted down, and there is considerable disparity in the financial support provided schools, based on the property tax levied by different communities. Suburban schools will frequently enjoy more than twice the per pupil support available to inner-city or rural schools. Attempts at equalization, even when ordered by state courts (as recently in New Jersey) often founder on the politics of "no new taxes." State legislatures are loath to enter the thicket of school finance in any major way, changing the formulas so that state subsidy is taken away from rich districts in favor of those that are poor. If schools in districts with a more favorable tax base offer superior education because of their greater financial resources, provided by state subsidy as well as local property tax funds, the parents of children attending those schools have no interest to see resources reduced by a shift in state subsidy. In suburbs populated by men and women who care about their schools, are articulate, and vote, there is no politically easy way for state legislatures to equalize funding across districts. This situation is not likely to be altered soon.

The disparity in educational expenditure across states is equally great; in 1991, Alabama provided $2,718 per pupil; California $3,840; Mississippi $2,548; New Jersey $6,564; New York $7,151; Oklahoma $3,093; Virginia $4,149; Wyoming $5,051.[7] These differential rates of support, however, do not tell the whole story about the quality of education; disparities within states are probably far more significant. They do, however, suggest a problem of equity to which no national consideration has been given.

No federal, executive or legislative initiatives have been taken to remedy this situation; neither political party has insisted on some sort of equalization of educational expenditure per pupil across states. Until that happens, the disparities will continue. Children residing in different sections of the country will be differentially advantaged or disadvantaged. So long as the federal government contributes less than 7 percent of the total education budget and Chapter I, (formerly Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1966, does not redress basic inequities, the prospects for change are very slight.

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Jonathan Kozol's report on this situation, as expressed in his book, *Savage Inequalities,* is only the latest in a series of documents that stretch back to the 1960s, describing the problems of school financing. His description is no more likely to change states' school financing policy than any of the previous reports.[8] Schools and school boards in the 1990s will have to adjust their budgets, as they have always done, to take account of the fiscal realities of their communities and states. That will mean, almost universally, making do with less. This is unfortunate for those who believe, as I do, that increased funds are essential for the improvement of underfunded schools and districts. In the absence of new money, changes in curriculum and overall school program must be encouraged. With some rearrangement of funds, facilitated by new administrative measures and with fewer mandates from state boards of education and the like, there is the possibility of some improvement.

There has been much discussion lately of an increased role for parents and families in school reform and school restructuring. Schools are being urged to help parents and families in various ways, not only in seeking to connect them to the classroom. Some of these ventures, such as those organized under the aegis of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning[9]—a consortium of five educational institutions—or the work of Dr. James Comer in New Haven, the Collaborative Decision Making project of the Denver Public Schools, and the injunctions issued by the New York State Board of Regents to the schools of New York State mandating greater parental involvement,[10] appear to promise greater parental interest in the schools, in their children's learning. Because longitudinal program evaluations are just beginning, we lack evidence to say what the results of these efforts to date have been.

A word of caution on parental involvement may be in order. When we consider how large and differentiated is the American public and the elementary school enterprise, with more than 20,000 elementary schools in over 15,000 districts, enrolling some 28 million pupils taught by almost 1.5 million teachers,[11] with some school districts and their administrators welcoming parental involvement, while other do not, the complexity of all such efforts is clear. The traditional vehicle for parent involvement in schools has been the Parent Teacher Association— a distinctly middle-class organization. Even in school districts where administrators encourage parental

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involvement, in middle-class communities where parents have the time, transport, and incentive to become interested, it is difficult to secure steady attendance at school functions. How much more difficult this is in rural areas, in the poorer neighborhoods of large (and not so large) cities, is obvious.

What, then, can be expected from increased participation by parents and families in their children's schools? First, a better understanding of the actual school program, the curriculum, the books and materials which their children are using; second, a better appreciation of how their children are learning, of their problems in learning, that teachers are able to convey in personal conversation with parents; third, as a consequence of the first two, an increased ability by parents to encourage their children's schoolwork, to supervise homework, to create an atmosphere in which their children will regard school favorably. The parents themselves, it is hoped, will take encouragement from their participation, and become motivated to think about their own learning in a new and more positive way. This last is clearly an objective of efforts now underway in the Schools Reaching Out Project of the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning.[12] Again, it is too early to see improved learning outcomes for children, but the results can hardly be negative.

What Is Happening Inside School Systems

What determines learning inside schools?—the school buildings, the level of mandated financial resources, the organization of the institution, leadership within the school, the number and quality of the teachers, the character of the educational program, the pupils.

Two points need to be made: First, the role of the school principal is vital; second, teachers and teaching need to be upgraded. It should have always been obvious that the principal is the individual upon whose leadership the school depends. Now, every one connected with the educational enterprise seems to recognize that: principals' academies are springing up; principals' associations are working for greater recognition of the need for better preparation and professional development; graduate schools of education are responding with new programs. Even television series like "DeGrassi High" emphasize the role of principals. If he or she is dynamic, has good public relations skills, knows the staff well, administers the school in

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a democratic manner, and is effective in garnering resources, the school is recognized to be good. If the principal lacks skill in these things, is headstrong and authoritarian with teachers so that they feel misused, the school is little thought of. But this is not just a public relation or perception. Principals make a difference, and anyone who visits schools knows this at once. Even with older, less well-equipped buildings, with great numbers of socially disadvantaged pupils, worn-out or inexperienced teachers, principals with a strong vision, with ideas and personality, and some administrative know-how can generally overcome obstacles.

Since principals are the front-line managers in any school system, it is appropriate that attention is paid them, that continuing professional training and education is now being offered. Principals in larger systems will not always have had in their earlier careers the experience and training they need. If they ascended by the curriculum route, they may not have learned very much about personnel, guidance, counseling, finance, and administration. So, also, with any other narrow band of experience. How to get the staff going, making use of a cabinet, giving teachers direction and scope, attending to outside forces and influences, being informed about developments in basic curricula, responding to the social problems and needs of disadvantaged pupils and their families—all these and more are required for managing and directing a school. Today's trend toward better recruitment, better preparation, more focused professional development is the one that school boards and institutions of higher education need to foster. If state departments of education, together with the federal government can provide greater incentives, giving support for such efforts, the schools will improve.

So, also, with programs to foster professional development among teachers to provide additional training. Teachers at every level have a need for opportunities for retraining. The public is too little aware of what a teacher's day is like, of how many class periods they are required to teach, to what range of problems they confront every day—problems the children bring with them, all sorts of scheduling matters, not to speak of the instruction for children with special needs, the attention they are expected to pay to the announcements and orders from the "front office," and the like. They need time to prepare their classes, make lesson plans, carry out these plans in the fixed instructional periods, at the same time being flexible, accom-

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modating to the moods of pupils, their various learning abilities, the special difficulties of children for whom English is not a first language. In the elementary grades, they teach a wide range of subjects and are expected to give pupils a firm grounding in basic intellectual skills: reading, writing, figuring, and thinking. In addition, teachers are expected to provide an introduction, at least, to an astonishing array of subjects and issues usually mandated by a state department of education: multicultural themes, aspects of American history, AIDS and sex education, science, not to speak of safety instruction for the use of bicycles and household equipment, learning how to negotiate traffic in a busy urban neighborhood, food safety, animal protection, environmental hazards, and the like.

To be an elementary grade teacher is to be involved in immensely complicated assignments. Fortunately, most teachers start when they are young; they have the idealism and energy to cope with the demands made on them. But, if the teacher wishes to be "up" on current materials and methods, when is she or he able to find the time to do so, to speak with others who have used the materials or tried the new methods? There is no time.

So again, as with the principals, greater attention has to be given to the continuing professional development of the teaching staff; if boards of education, parent-teacher associations, employers, and legislators wish to see their elementary schools improved, they must provide the time, and indeed pay for it, so that teachers can in fact develop their professional competence. John Goodlad has called for "teacher renewal";[13] it is a concept that ought to appeal to all who are concerned with education.

What Is Happening Between the Outside and the Inside of Schools

The publication in 1983 of "A Nation At Risk" focused national attention on the need to improve public education. School restructuring, curriculum change, and parental involvement and choice were terms used to describe what was needed to remedy school failure. Any blanket condemnation of schools is foolish, if only because the enterprise is so varied, so complex, so large. There is a need to look at individual schools or school districts, to assess their performance for all students, taking into account the level of financial resources, the quality and experience of the teaching staff, the leadership of the principal, the nature of the student body.

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The widespread dissatisfaction with school performance as measured by scores on standardized tests, the rates of graduation, and the success in entering postsecondary education or employment has had at least one good result. It has generated a great deal of discussion during the last ten years, but also much activity by groups and organizations, public and private, concerned with school improvement. Three conditions must be borne in mind in considering their effects. First, most are so recent that longitudinal evaluation has not been possible. Second, no national clearinghouse exists to make good practice in one district known to districts elsewhere though the federal Department of Education is seeking to do this. Third, the social-economic problems of many children exceeds the ability and competence of schools to address or remedy them; in districts with significant numbers of disadvantaged children, educational reform and school restructuring may not be working.

Collaboration: The New Watchword

In the movement toward educational reform, schools are urged to involve surrounding communities: parents, obviously, but also a variety of organizations and business firms, and, very importantly, institutions of higher education. The latter are being asked to contribute to schools in all sorts of new ways. Recently, the American Association of Higher Education published its second report on the linking of colleges and universities to schools, describing 1,286 such "partnerships" between public and private institutions.[14] An impressive document, it cites programs addressed to at-risk populations, mostly for junior high and high school age populations. Some of these efforts are long-standing; many are quite recent. Though a large majority of the collaborative efforts described are not addressed to early childhood or the elementary grades, any school district that wishes to do so can generally find a college or university interested in such collaboration. In due course, one may hope that as much attention will be given to younger children in preschool and elementary grades as is now being given to adolescents.

Other examples of interesting collaboration include the work presently conducted by the National Executive Service Corps with the public high schools of New York City, providing expert consulting to selected schools on a variety of management issues. The plan is to extend this program to elementary schools as well. The Boston University experiment in managing the Chelsea, Massachusetts

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school district is well known. So, also, is the work of Dr. James Comer of Yale University, cooperating with New Haven school parents. The Minneapolis Youth Trust, organized in the spring of 1989 by Mayor Don Fraser and a group of Minneapolis business and community leaders, sponsors a program entitled "Success By Six," targeting preschoolers and kindergarten children. The Collaborative Decision Making program of the Denver Public Schools encourages parents of each school to become involved in hiring, budget-making, and curriculum development. The work of the Institute for Responsive Education in Boston, already noted, has organized a Center on Families, Schools, Communities and Children's Learning; the League of Schools Reaching Out project has brought approximately forty-two schools to interact with their communities.[15]

All such institutional innovation provides additional resources for the schools. Still, before too much is made of their accomplishments, we need to know a great deal more about the results of such efforts in classrooms with specific groups of children. Because careful longitudinal testing and evaluation of the effects of such school-community, school-higher education efforts is lacking, we cannot be sure about how the basic skills of children have been affected. Evaluation is costly and difficult. For a classroom of children in any specific intervention program, detailed baseline data needs to be collected; the children must be followed over a period of years. Family factors need to be assessed; the nature of the particular intervention or interventions analyzed, with attention being given to the interaction of the several programs that may be operating at the same time. Family mobility is a problem, particularly in urban settings where a first, second, sixth, or seventh grade pupil population may turn over twice in the course of a single school year. Following a particular child becomes difficult. Teacher turnover in urban schools may also pose problems. The central office personnel of a large school system may not be very skilled in data analysis, in program evaluation. This task is one that the Department of Education, under the new administration in Washington, might profitably undertake.

CAN SCHOOLING BE MADE THE CRUCIAL FACTOR FOR CHILDREN?

The answer is a qualified yes, but only if the rhetoric of recent years is replaced by concrete actions. First, there must be movement in the schools themselves: teachers must be liberated (and that is not

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hyperbole) from nonteaching duties so that they are able to teach. That will require the rearrangement of responsibilities and resources in the school. It will mean that the principal, acting in concert with the school board, is determined to change the organization of daily life within the school. Is this at all realistic? It is impossible to know; if it does not happen, however, all other initiatives will be of little or no avail. Teachers will tell you that they spend 20 or so minutes out of a class period in actual instruction. The rest of the time is controlled by announcements, paperwork, shepherding pupils from one room to another for special programs, taking care of the discipline problems or hyperactive children. This has to change. Class size must be reduced in the primary grades, so that no teacher is responsible for more than twenty-five to thirty children. That will be expensive, particularly for large school systems; it will entail hiring a significant number of additional teachers. Local school boards will be obliged to take the case to their communities, hoping for increased local funding. State governments will have to increase their support. If neither is possible, teachers' aides must be added in some number. A room with thirty-three six year olds, speaking twenty-seven different languages, cannot be adequately handled by a single teacher.

The local school board must make the continuing professional education of its teaching staff a first-order priority. The various national organizations of school boards and school administrators and teachers must come together to foster a new commitment to primary education; this requires new programs and standards, but also new resources. Again, this ought to be a priority of the federal Department of Education in the new administration in Washington.

Schools must be encouraged to involve parents in new ways, particularly parents from low income neighborhoods. Since this is an exceedingly difficult task in many cities and regions, other civic organizations and institutions must be called on for help. If influential organizations and groups in any city assert their interest in the schools, and agree to proffer their assistance in this one area, turning their energies to devising ways to connect parents to schools and schools to parents, they will be performing a major service.

Finally, at least for those schools, urban, suburban, and rural, that enroll significant numbers of children from low income families, some form of social service resource must be developed on the school site, making the school a vital instrument for rendering assistance to poor families. Such proposals are controversial; the argument is made that schools are not and should not become social service

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agencies. Still, it is impossible to close our eyes to the depth and extent of the social problems that afflict so many young American children at this time. Schools are obliged to deal with these problems when pupils walk in their front door. If the problems are almost always caused or associated with home life and families, it is important that families be able to look upon the school as a place where they can find help—not so much from school personnel as from others stationed at the site.[16]

At the state level, boards of education, regents, and departments of education ought to "lighten up" their mandates and requirements. School districts are overregulated. Just as teachers need to be liberated by administrators from nonteaching duties, encouraged to be more creative and experimental, so local school districts and their boards need to try new approaches, new methods of organization, experimenting with new schedules and new materials. State boards of education should stop mandating the use of the same textbooks for every classroom in the state. Why should an elementary school principal or a second grade teacher be interested in trying something new if required to teach from a textbook chosen and mandated by a state education agency? State boards must move strongly to encourage and assist continuing professional education. Lastly, political leadership in state government must start or continue the process of educating the general public to the need for more adequate funding of poorer school districts. Inevitably, this will mean higher taxes; the population of wealthier districts will not countenance equalization if it means taking money away from their schools.

At the federal level, there are two major possibilities for actions that would greatly contribute to school improvement: first, a strong commitment to address the social and economic condition of poor families in America—their health, housing, job training, and employment opportunities, but also child care and transportation. Realistic goals must be established by region or metropolitan area, year by year, for the rest of this decade. Second, there must be a rationalizing of the many educational programs and funds, now spread across federal departments and agencies, legislated by Congress at different times for different purposes, and addressed to different clienteles. Even a cursory study of each year's Federal Executive Budget and appropriation bills reveals a hodgepodge of programs with varying eligibility and program requirements, only encouraging competition among federal and state agencies for jurisdiction and distribution of funds. This important task might begin with a comprehensive study

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initiated by the General Accounting Office. Such an effort would produce three useful results: funds would come to light; they might be better targeted to places and sectors of the population that need them most; local education agencies would find it simpler to gain access to funds.

A similar effort needs to be made in addressing specifically the conditions of low income families, neighborhoods, and regions. The number and range of programs and funds administered by the federal government directed to populations in need are very large. These funds are often commingled with funds for the general population, complicating the process of administration at the state agency level. Rationalization is very much needed.

If there is one major imperative for the new administration, in respect to low income families and their children, their health, housing, and education, and if it is to be linked to public assistance and job training programs for adults, a clear picture of what is now being attempted through federal programs must be obtained so that reasonable assessments can be made about what programs are better than others, allowing a rationalized administrative process to be put in place. This is an immense task; it cuts to the heart of agency "turf" and jurisdiction.

For children who are healthy and living in secure home conditions, schooling is a crucial factor; for many, it is *the* crucial factor in their move towards adulthood. For children who are not so advantaged, education will become a crucial factor only if certain other things are done first. If left undone, it is almost certain that the human resources essential to the nation's needs will continue to be wasted. Education is a crucial variable for those who are able to take advantage of it. For those who cannot, it remains a hope but is in fact a mirage.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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ENDNOTES

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John Condry

Thief of Time, Unfaithful Servant: Television and the American Child

THE TIDE OF BIOLOGICAL EVOLUTION moves slowly, giving advantage to some mutations over a period of centuries and eons. Social evolution is another matter altogether. Driven by discovery and invention, it is often rapid and unpredictable. Some inventions cause little change, usually for the better, occasionally for the worse—gunpowder comes to mind. But some inventions change culture and society in profound and unpredictable ways, unknowable except in hindsight.

There is something wrong today with American children, in the way they are growing up. That is obvious. Many explanations are given; they generally relate to the rapid changes of recent years. Increased transportation has changed the fabric of cities, destroying old neighborhoods, disrupting their social infrastructure. Families appear to be in disarray; the schools are functioning badly, if at all. Standardized test scores have declined steadily for the last twenty years, and there is no improvement in sight.[1] Suicides and homicides are on the increase. Many children show signs of physical disorder, mental distress. Can television be said to be in any way responsible for these conditions?

To understand the role that television plays in the lives of American children, it is important to begin with a broad overview of children's needs. How do children become useful members of society? How is their immaturity used to prepare them for adulthood? How do they spend their time? Time is a useful measure because, unlike wealth and opportunity, it is the same commodity for all. If there are 24 hours in a day, if many are awake for 16, the total of

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their 112 conscious hours each week is a proper object of study. How are those 112 hours spent by America's children today, especially by those aged three to eleven?

Until about two hundred years ago, most children spent this time in the communities and villages in which they were born, observing adults in their everyday activities of work and play. Children learned the skills and attitudes necessary to fit into the familiar society that was near-at-hand. The skills and capacities they developed as children were useful when they became adults. What was learned in the family in one generation was practiced by families in the next. The child learned about work and living; he or she acquired knowledge of the world as it existed in the family and community.

Some of this began to change with the coming of the industrial revolution.[2] People, moving in increasing numbers from communities they had lived in for generations to cities, old and new, looked for novel economic and social opportunities. In the new urban industrial world, children observed life in quite new ways. Schools were invented to supplement the learning opportunities of everyday observation.[3]

The situation has changed even more dramatically in recent years. In an average week, American children are known to spend approximately 40 hours watching television and playing video games. When 40 hours in school, including the time spent traveling to and from school and doing homework are added, only 32 hours remain for interacting with peers and family. If we are to understand what children know about the world and themselves, a close look at the environments created by family, school, peers, and especially television is called for. The role of television in creating an environment for the socialization of children merits study.

MOTIVATION FOR WATCHING TELEVISION

Children approach television and watch it with motives significantly different from what is common among adults. Most adults, by their own admission, watch television to be "entertained."[4] Most children, while they find television entertaining, watch because they seek to understand the world. Many adults see television as trivial; they watch it with what is sometimes called a "suspension of disbelief." To be entertained, they accept departures from realistic portrayals, and, depending on the premises of the program, understand why someone is flying through the air, becoming invisible, performing

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superhuman acts. Fictional drama, by definition, need not be possible, real, or true.

Children, while enjoying the entertaining aspects of television, because of their limited understanding of the world, have greater difficulty in separating fact from fiction.[5] They are vulnerable in a way that adults are not. The primary influences on children—family, peers, school, and television—all function together. Children are not very expert in separating what they learn in these different contexts. Indeed, the utility of information obtained in one is partly dependent on what is learned in the others. Without family support, much of what occurs in school loses its importance. If schools were more effective, television would not be so powerful. Peers exert their influence and power to the extent that family and school do not.

EXPOSURE AND CONTENT

The influence of television depends on two factors: exposure and content. The greater the exposure, the greater, in general, the influence. The nature of that influence will in some measure be determined by content. Still, exposure alone influences viewers, regardless of content. So let us look at some facts about exposure.

Television came into the United States in the 1950s. In the first year of that decade, approximately 10 percent of American homes boasted a television set; by 1960, that number had risen to 90 percent, and almost everyone who owned a television set watched it regularly. The introduction of television caused a large shift in how most Americans spent their time. While the invention of the automobile occasioned only a 6 percent increase in travel time, though longer distances were involved, the introduction of television occasioned a 58 percent increase in time spent with the media, by some calculations.[6]

The time the television set is turned on in the average household—currently more than 7 hours a day—has increased steadily since 1950, with the average person watching about 4 hours a day during the week, and slightly more on weekends. In the 1980s, when cable and VCRs became widely available, the audience share of the three major networks started dropping from approximately 90 percent of American homes to about 60 percent today. However, the amount of time spent watching has remained roughly the same, divided now among more program sources. These statistics are as relevant for

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children as for adults. The average American child watches approximately 4–5 hours of television a day during the week, and 7–9 hours a day on weekends, about 40 hours a week.[7] This includes videotaped movies rented and watched at home on a television set, video games, and cable television. Regardless of what they watch, children who are heavy viewers tend to read less, play less, be more obese. These are the "indirect effects" of constant viewing.[8]

If obesity is a national problem for young people in the United States, does television play a significant role in creating the condition?[9] While it is not clear how strong a causal relationship exists, there are good reasons to suspect one. Watching television, a physically passive activity, is often accompanied by eating, and studies show a decrease in metabolic rate among television viewers, especially for children who are already obese.[10] The foods advertised on television may stimulate eating on the part of the viewer, and food is the most commonly advertised product.

Television is a thief of time. When children watch for hours on end, they are not doing any number of other things that in the long run may be vastly more important in terms of their development. But television is more than a thief of time; its content in programs and advertisements deeply influences children's attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

Children generally begin by watching cartoons around the age of two. By about six, most children, fully 90 percent, have developed a television habit.[11] As they move into middle childhood, six to eleven years, situation comedies (sitcoms) become more popular with children.

Cartoons are watched by young children because they are well marked—every action is highlighted with attention-getting features. This "marking" makes for attention and comprehension.[12] Because children's attention does wander, the sound effects of television help to draw them back to the set.[13]

For the most part, children's attention is not held because the material is broadly comprehensible. Children understand something of the content of individual programs, but not in the way that adults do. They cannot understand long sequences; they have less understanding of the motives and intentions of individual characters. They are not able to draw inferences from unseen action, implied but not shown.[14]

Children see violence, for example, and in their own way may conclude that "might makes right." They are unlikely to understand,

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however, the more subtle messages conveyed, that certain actions are more justified than others. They do understand the proposition that if you want something and have greater power than another, you get what you want. That message figures prominently in the "action adventure" cartoons that have replaced the live shows originally shown on television for children.[15] It has been amply documented that the amount of violence on children's shows is substantially greater than on adult programs shown during prime time. A recent study, for example, found an average of twenty-five acts of violence per hour in children's programming compared with five acts of violence per hour during prime time. The action/adventure cartoons are "stories of power."[16]

Does watching such stories influence the behavior of children? Hundreds of studies, done since the early 1960s—experimental studies of small numbers of children and large field studies in different cultures, using a variety of techniques[17]—broadly agree that children of both sexes who are heavy viewers of television are more aggressive than children who are light viewers.[18] Viewing violent television not only affects their behavior but also their attitudes, beliefs, and values. Youngsters who are heavy viewers of television, for example, are generally more fearful of violence in the real world.[19] Many are desensitized to violence, less moved by it, less responsive to it.[20]

The content of television directed toward children presents males and females in stereotypical roles; heavy viewers, in their sex role attitudes, show the influence of what they have seen on television.[21] In its portraits of the very young and the very old, in its portrayal of doctors and police, in its treatment of the mentally ill, television conventions seriously distort real life situations.[22]

As children grow older, they become more capable of grasping complex stories in part because they know more about the world, but also because they are more familiar with the forms and structure of television, having become television literate. They find situation comedies agreeable. Like cartoons, they are "marked" with a laugh track rather than with unusual sounds, but the effects on attention and comprehension are the same. Sitcoms, over the years, have become one of the most enduring and popular forms of television. They are not violent. Laugh tracks tell children that something important has happened; this, in turn, helps to introduce them to the manners and values of their culture, especially sexual manners.[23]

As children move into early adolescence, around nine to ten years, their tastes become more gender differentiated; they begin to resem-

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ble the tastes of adults. Many girls like soap operas, believing that it teaches them about life; many boys like action adventure, for many of the same reasons. The action adventure programs feature males in lead roles, usually triumphing over an evil villain. These messages are especially appealing to boys. Shows featuring male heroes also appeal to girls, though the reverse is not true; boys tend to avoid programs in which girls or women are in the lead roles. This is one reason why there are so few television programs for children with females in lead roles; they are simply not as profitable.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Are children not doing what they have always done, observing society in order to learn about their place in it? Does television not inform them of manners and mores, just as in an earlier age children acquired such information from observing those around them?

The simple answer: yes and no. Yes, children are doing what they have always done, with less help than ever from adults; no, television does not inform them about the world—it frequently misinforms them. Television is not designed to provide information about the real world to children. When used in this way, it does a very poor job. Modern television, particularly as utilized in the United States at this time, has only one purpose. That purpose is to sell things. Television is fundamentally a marketing device. Its values are the values of the marketplace; its structure and content mirror that purpose.

The task of those who program television is to capture the public's attention, and to hold it long enough to advertise a product. Given human psychology, this is not easy. Human beings are easily bored, easily desensitized. To gain our attention, television is constantly obliged to change. Its interests are only in the immediate present; it has no concern to dwell on problems that defy short-term solutions. The recent riots in Los Angeles, prime-time news for a week, are forgotten in a month, if television is taken to be a mirror of the public's memory.

Television drama has no reason to be concerned with reality. If distorting reality gains attention, distortion will occur. Winning audience attention is the primary concern of television; even that part said to be "educational." Although educational television is not, for the most part, concerned with selling products, it competes with commercial television for an audience.

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Television lives in the present; it has no respect for the past, little interest in the future. Watching television encourages such attitudes; they can be disastrous for children. One of the prime functions of education, both at home and in school, is to connect the past with the future, to show how the present derives from what has gone before, how the future is related to both.

Television is ruled by the clock. Whatever drama or uncertainty is introduced must be resolved and satisfied by the end of the program. The products are there to be sold. Time dictates movement to another program, to other products. Television resembles schools in at least this respect. If a student becomes interested in a specific topic, if a revealing and exciting discussion begins just before the bell, there is no reprieve from the tyranny of the clock. The bell rings—it is time to change topics. Such attitudes trivialize interest and impede learning; they tell children not to become too involved in anything. Is it any wonder that teachers report that children's attention wanders, that they do not stick to anything for very long, even things they themselves choose?[24] Neither television nor schools promote interest in topics beyond what the clock allows; this trivializes the pursuit of knowledge.

Television shows no real curiosity, and it is not a common attribute among children addicted to its programs. Television, the ultimate "know it all," has no place for mystery. Real mystery takes time to understand; it presumes a fundamental base of knowledge, stimulated by real world situations.

There may be a 30-second news sound bite about a real mystery, but children have little interest in the news; they watch other things, sometimes television shows about mysteries. One, called "Unsolved Mysteries," is usually about trivia—a spaceship that landed somewhere in New Jersey or some other comparable make-believe event. This is not reality; it is not mystery.

If children today are cruel to each other, as some say, lack compassion, laugh at weakness, and have contempt for people whose need for help shows too plainly, are any of these attitudes attributable to what is shown on television? The poor and unfortunate, rarely represented on television, when shown, are typically held up to ridicule. Wealth is the key to a good life on television; the most admired are rich, live in mansions, and drive around in stretch limos.

The really absurd thing is that nobody on television is shown working for the wealth they display. There is no connection between hard work and the good life. Children, looking for the quick fix, seek

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the good life as television defines it—having things—but they do not know how to get them. How could they? Showing working people is an anathema to television; a waste of time! It makes for boring television, and that is impermissible. On television, every moment has to be arousing, every event attention-getting. Under these circumstances, it is impossible to represent the causal relationship between work and wealth, or any others not easily depicted and visually presentable.

WHAT DOES TELEVISION TEACH?

As Nicholas Johnson, a former commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission, once said, "All television is educational: The question is, what does it teach?" Let us consider a few specific cases. For about the last ten years, the country has been engaged in what is euphemistically called a "War on Drugs." Almost everyone agrees that a central feature of this "war" is the educational component. As part of the effort, several organizations like the Partnership for a Drug Free America have sponsored brief 30-second Public Service Announcements (PSAs) on television, urging the public, especially the young, to avoid drug use. The influence of these brief messages is unknown, but the scant evidence available suggests that they are not especially effective.[25] Why not?

One reason, perhaps, is that while television will occasionally urge people to avoid drugs, the more common message suggests that television approves of the use of drugs. To test the proposition, Cynthia Scheibe, Tim Christensen, and I did a study of prodrug and antidrug messages on television. A representative sample of 1989 television content (programs and ads) were coded; every message pertaining to drugs—either prodrug (where someone taking a drug was shown in a positive light), or antidrug (where someone taking a drug was shown in a negative light)—was interpreted.[26] We limited our analysis to messages concerning alcoholic beverages, smoking tobacco, or drugs taken orally, inhaled, or smoked. If someone was shown drinking or smoking cigarettes, enjoying themselves without negative consequences, we called this a "prodrug message." If someone, doing these things, came to harm in some way, we considered this an "antidrug message."

During the 36 hours of television sampled, from two typical days, there were 149 drug-related messages. Of these, 121 were prodrug

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(81.2 percent), twenty-two were antidrug (14.8 percent), and six were ambiguous. For every antidrug message, six were prodrug. For certain drugs, the ratio was even larger; for alcohol alone, for example, there were ten prodrug messages for every antidrug message.

Many of the "prodrug" messages occur in product advertisements for over-the-counter medicines, beer, or wine. They are also represented in role portrayals where characters happily use legal drugs—cigarettes and alcohol—to make themselves feel better, celebrate success, pick themselves up after a defeat, relax after a hard day.

For every message on television that says, "Just say no," there are six that say, "If you don't like the state you are in, take a drug to change it." Can't sleep? Take a drug. Can't stay awake? Take a drug. Want to lose weight? Take a drug. Feeling a little down? Take a drug, or have a beer or a glass of wine. Thus, while public service campaigns may be working to influence attitudes on the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse, the majority of messages on television portray a world in which drug and alcohol use is alarmingly common. What does this teach the young about the use and abuse of substances? Does it not really say that drugs are legitimate, part of the common culture, except for the few, of course, that are not on the approved list?[27]

The portrayal of sex on television is not very different. Many preadolescent and adolescent children watch television, seeing it as a source of information about sexual behavior. Such information, not otherwise widely available, with many parents having difficulty talking to their children about sex, is crucial for many. In a 1969 survey, parents and peers were mentioned as principal sources of information about sexuality; television did not figure. In a survey conducted in 1987, two-thirds of the adult respondents believed that television encouraged sexual activity in teenagers, and did not portray sexuality in a manner that could be described as realistic.[28]

A 1986 study asked 1,100 adolescent children, aged ten to fourteen, what television programs they watched. A content analysis of the sexual portrayals in these programs followed.[29] Most references to sex were verbal, not visual. Sexual intercourse was generally between unmarried couples. Sex was most commonly portrayed in the afternoon soap operas. In the evening shows, sexual behavior was commonly rendered in a humorous vein, with serious portrayals confined to the late evening programs such as *Dallas*. Homosexuality, seldom mentioned, figured frequently as a humorous theme. It

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was uncommon for the ordinary range of loving, sexual behavior to be represented in such shows.

The average adolescent viewer was exposed to some 2,500 references to sex a year on television.[30] One researcher wrote:

> Sex is treated as a prelude to, or context for, violence or is viewed as an aspect of life to be treated with nervous laughter. On situation comedies and variety shows, characters touch, kiss, embrace, and through seductive innuendo and flirtation suggest sexual intimacy; these suggestive messages are usually accompanied by canned laughter.[31]

Is it any wonder that children today have difficulty with intimacy? Sexual behavior cannot be learned from television for two reasons: first, the portrayals are generally false and distorted; second, we are told nothing about what we might value or prefer from the range of possibilities that exist.

THE VALUE STRUCTURE OF TELEVISION

It is not just the informational structure of television that ought to concern us; its value structure is equally flawed. Analyzing the values expressed in commercials in 1983, using a well-recognized scale that divides values into traits that are a means to a end, *instrumental* values, and those that are ends in themselves, *terminal* values, we learn a great deal. A person may value hard work, for example, because it leads to financial security; by this definition, "hard work" is an instrumental value; "financial security" is a terminal value. When this scale is offered, the most important instrumental values reported are being honest, helpful, responsible, and broad-minded. Typical terminal values include: equality, peace, and a world of beauty.[32] By coding the values expressed in a random sample of all television commercials, a profile emerges of what the ads tell us we ought to be.[33]

The most frequently mentioned instrumental values in commercials were "capable," "helpful," and "smart"; the least frequently mentioned were "courageous" and "forgiving." Of the values relating to personal appearance, the most frequently stressed were "beautiful" and "youthful." "Sexy" appeared relatively infrequently, in about 6 percent of the commercials analyzed.

In contrast to these instrumental values, one terminal value dominated all the rest: "happiness." The value of happiness was empha-

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sized in nearly 60 percent of all commercials, mentioned more than twice as often as any other value. "Social recognition" was the second most frequently mentioned terminal value. Self-serving or self-oriented terminal values (for example, personal happiness, an exciting life, social recognition) registered much more frequently than certain more altruistic values, such as "equality" and "friendship."

The value profile was different for different program types; values on children's programs, for example, were different from the overall sample. Commercials designed especially for children had lower frequencies than the overall sample for nearly all so-called altruistic values. They tended, instead, to stress playing hard, having fun, being happy. Commercials on programs designed for children rarely stressed being helpful or obedient; the value of good health rarely figured. The values stressed by commercials extolling selfish and self-serving values over altruistic values ought to give us pause.

The values conveyed by specific programs are more difficult to study; the programs are longer, and the values expressed are less obvious in an overall story line than a few words spoken in a 30-second commercial. Still, there is the same distortion of facts about the real world. Most people believe, for example, that criminals get away with crimes because the courts are too lenient, prison sentences are too short. The facts are in fact precisely the opposite. In most American cities, only 15–18 percent of all reported felonies ever result in arrests. Of that number, most are convicted, sent away for long periods of time. There are three times as many people in prison today as there were ten or twelve years ago; we have the longest prison sentences of any industrialized nation in the Western world.[34]

Where, then, do we get our ideas about crime and punishment if the facts are at such variance with common opinion? The answer may be that television shows, generally as a dramatic device, portray just such a situation. On television, criminals are usually caught by the police, but they often escape punishment because of lenient and permissive judges. Police, seldom if ever, make mistakes on television; they know the guilty person before they catch him. Seeing such shows every night, week in and week out, beliefs about the police and justice—the very shape and form of the American democracy—are instilled. It is impossible to believe that repeated exposure to stories of this sort does not play a role in the political decisions reached by legislators and the votes of the electorate.

The moral value structure of television is completely interwoven with the portrayal of character. In research on this topic, individuals,

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watching a television show, were asked to rate the morality of various actions on a scale from good to bad. Participants in the research were required to express their liking for each character. We learned that the morality of a specific action depended on who did it.[35] Moral behavior, presented on television, depends for its rightness or wrongness on whether the act is done by a character who is admired and liked, or by one who is distrusted and disliked. Many behaviors that would ordinarily be considered "immoral" (blackmail, murder, robbery, and the like) are acceptable if they are done by someone who enjoys the good opinion of the audience.

There appear to be different moral structures available to those who view a program depending on their familiarity with the characters.[36] The moral judgments of people unfamiliar with the characters seem to be made on a scale of ideal morality, without factoring in the likability of the characters. But the moral judgments of people familiar with the characters, those who "know" and have feelings for or against the characters, are quite different. What is wrong for people we do not like is right for those we care for.

This is the moral structure of most programs studied, including programs for both adults and children. Whether something is right or wrong, then, at least on television, depends on who does it, not what is done. The values of television are focused on the characters. There are good people and bad people; the good people can do no wrong; the bad people can do no right. If this sounds familiar, it is; this is the moral outlook of a five year old.

All of these examples suggest that television cannot be a useful source of information for children. Indeed, it may be a dangerous source of information. It offers ideas that are false, unreal; it has no coherent value system, other than consumerism; it provides little useful information about the self. All of this makes television a terrible instrument for socialization. Since it was never meant to be a tool for the socialization of the young, children who use it in this manner face the possibility of growing up absurd.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

We must stop kidding ourselves about television; we must start acting on what we now know. Some parents may be expected to restrict the amount of time children are allowed to watch television, using as an excuse the one that would be employed if the child

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wanted to eat nothing but Frosted Flakes; such a diet is deleterious to health. Personal, communal, physical, and mental damage is inflicted. Not all parents will say this; not all believe it.

Those parents who do, should talk about the television they watch with their children, commenting on the parts that seem particularly false, deceptive. This may help, but it must be noted that most research on parent-child viewing patterns shows that there is relatively little coviewing, except in the evening in certain homes where parents control the program content.[37] Wise parents will talk with their children about the programs they watch in the early afternoon, on Saturday and Sunday morning, when adults are not present. This may make children more critical about using television as the principal source of information about the world.

If we accept that children will watch some television, we must do what we can to improve what is available to them. It is essential that good educational programs are adequately funded, many more than now exist. Programs, useful to children, must be produced in greater number. There is no reason why these programs cannot be entertaining. They will necessarily compete with commercially-produced programs, and the battle will not be easily won. To fight strenuously for the health and happiness of children is not an easy matter.

Children need to be taught about television in school, both about the programs and the ads. We need to instruct children in what use can be made of television, and where it is not useful. If children learn that the acquisition of goods is not the supreme purpose of life, and that many of the values taught in the television programs and ads contradict what is taught in school, that will be a pure gain. Instead of ignoring television, schools ought to encourage children to discuss programs, the ideas, good and bad, that are communicated. Schools should develop instructional programs to teach children to be critical viewers of television, doing so at a very early age. Allow them to use video equipment to make small shows and commercials; let them understand for themselves how easy it is for the camera to distort reality.

CONCLUSIONS

Many American children are troubled today; one of the reasons is that they spend too much of their childhood watching television. Television viewing is a thief of time; it robs children of critical hours

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required for learning about the world, about one's place in it. That is bad enough, but television is more than a thief; it is a liar. When they watch television, children see it as a reasonable source of information about the world. It is not, but there is no way for them to know this. For the little truth television communicates, there is much that is false and distorted, about values as well as facts.

The dramatic program content of television is exceptionally violent compared to the everyday life it pretends to present. "Action cartoons," watched by millions of children, contain some of the most violent scenes now visible on television. Children respond to what they see by themselves acting more violently, showing insensitivity to violence, acquiring beliefs and values that tell them that the world is a "mean and dangerous" place where violent action is to be expected and admired.

While television viewing affects the actions, values, and beliefs of those who watch it, it does not affect everyone equally. It depends on how much time is spent watching the screen and the content of the programs viewed. The knowledge of the viewer and his or her social surroundings—particularly the social (family) context of the viewing—are critical factors in mediating the influence of television. Because so few families do much "mediating" of television, and because schools are equally uninvolved, children are left alone to make what sense they can of the medium and its offerings.

Television exerts a powerful influence on the young precisely because other institutions that touch American children, at the moment, are functioning so poorly. At another time and place, television might not have had the influence it enjoys today. Is it romantic to believe that some part of childhood in other centuries was given over to the telling of stories and tales, and, in more recent times, to reading to the very young, encouraging it in older children? For many young children, television has replaced family folktales with modern, homogeneous, and less coherent stories. Time spent in watching television takes the child away from reading; reading skills are poorly developed and the value of reading is unappreciated. Children are given over to an unfaithful servant who exposes them to "casual tales told by casual people."[38]

In many ways, the problems of the schools are mirrored in television. Excellence is a lost art in the schools, and is hardly ever recognized on television. Curiosity is diminished, and involvement is not required—the schools and the producers of television are agreed at least on this point. The term educate is replaced with the term

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"trained." Who teaches values? The schools? The churches? The family? Television certainly does. But are the values of television the only ones we would have our children adopt?

Most of us who watch television as a steady habit are influenced by its content, distorted in more ways than its emphasis on violence. Whose fault is it that children watch too much television, that television is harmful to the developing child? Who is to blame?

Television itself bears a considerable share of the responsibility. Television is a greedy American institution; it serves the interests of its corporate sponsors far more than it does the interest of the public.[39] Since its inception, television has used excessive, gratuitous violence as an attention-getting device; in the face of widespread public condemnation, it has continued to do so. The commercialization of the medium pervades everything that it does. Television, while responsible for its content, cannot be blamed for the manner in which people use it.

Are children, then, to blame? Is it their fault that the information conveyed on television is so distorted? Or, is it the fault of the schools, entrusted with the job of teaching about our culture, who have failed so conspicuously to teach about television?

Television is not going to disappear, and it is unlikely ever to change sufficiently to make it a reasonable environment for the socialization of children. This fact must be accepted. We may tinker with content, make certain that better programs are made available to children, but the more important need is to discourage children from using television as a source for information about the world. If we insist that children watch less television, we need to provide them with other ideas of how they might spend their time. Children need to know about themselves as much as they need to know the world; this information is only obtained from acting in the world, from real human interaction. Children need more experience, and less television.

Television cannot teach children what they need to know as they grow into adolescence and adulthood. Television is an advertising medium; as such, it has a legitimate place. It may be entertaining; there is nothing intrinsically wrong with entertainment. Television may be informative, and that is a good. Still, as an instrument of socialization, it fails; this must be recognized and acted on. Schools and families need to do a better job than they are now doing, and they need all the help that is available. Reducing the influence of

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television in the lives of children is a good first step. The time to take that step is now.

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[20]R. S. Drabman and M. H. Thomas, "Does Media Violence Increase Children's Toleration of Real-Life Aggression?," *Developmental Psychology* 10 (3) (1974): 418–21; M. H. Thomas and R. S. Drabman, "Toleration of Real Life Aggression as a Function of Exposure to Televised Violence and Age of Subject," *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 21 (1975): 227–32; V. B. Cline, R. G. Croft, and S. Courrier, "Desensitization of Children to Television Violence," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27 (1973): 360–65; M. H. Thomas, R. W. Horton, E. C. Lippincott, and R. S. Drabman, "Desensitization to Portrayals of Real-Life Aggression as a Function of Exposure to Television Violence," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 35 (1977): 450–58.

[21]M. Morgan, "Television, Sex-Role Attitudes, and Sex-Role Behavior," *Journal of Early Adolescence* 7 (1987): 269–82. See also Huston et al., *Young Children's Perceptions of Television Reality,* 29–31.

[22]B. S. Greenberg, *Life on Television: Content Analyses of U.S. TV Drama* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1980).

[23]E. J. Roberts, "Television and Sexual Learning in Childhood," in D. Pearl et al., *Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties,* 209–23.

[24]Speech by J. T. Gatto, New York City Teacher of the Year, *The Threefold Review* (5) (Summer 1991): 10–14.

[25]C. A. Atkin, "Effects of Drug Commercials on Young Viewers," *Journal of Communication* 28 (4) (1978): 71–79; M. Ray and S. Ward, "Experimentation for Pretesting Public Health Programs: The Case of Anti-Drug Abuse Campaigns," *Advances in Consumer Research* 3 (1976): 278–86.

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[26]C. Scheibe, J. C. Condry, and T. Christensen, *Anti-Drug and Pro-Drug Messages on Television,* unpublished CRETV document, Ithaca, N.Y. (forthcoming).

[27]It might be argued that young children do not pay attention to advertisements for drugs, but two recent studies in the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* suggest the contrary. See P. M. Fisher, M. P. Schwartz, J. W. Richards, Jr., A. O. Goldstein, and T. H. Rojas, "Brand Logo Recognition by Children Aged 3 to 6 Years: Mickey Mouse and Old Joe the Camel," *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* 266 (22) (11 December 1991): 3145–148. See also J. R. DiFranza, J. W. Richards, P. M. Paulman, N. Wolf-Gillespie, C. Fletcher, R. D. Jaffe, and D. Murray, "RJR Nabisco's Cartoon Camel Promotes Camel Cigarettes to Children," *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)* 266 (22) (11 December 1991): 3149–153.

[28]*Attitudes About Television, Sex and Contraceptive Advertising* (New York: Harris and Associates, 1987).

[29]B. S. Greenberg, C. Stanley, M. Siemicki, C. Heeter, A. Soderman, and R. Linsangan, *Sex Content on Soaps and Primetime Television Series Most Viewed by Adolescents. Project CAST, Report # 2* (East Lansing, Mich.: Department of Telecommunication, Michigan State University, 1986).

[30]Ibid., 34.

[31]Roberts, "Television and Sexual Learning in Childhood," in D. Pearl et al., *Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties,* 222.

[32]M. Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values* (New York: The Free Press, 1973). See also M. Rokeach, *Understanding Human Values* (New York: The Free Press, 1979).

[33]C. Scheibe, *Character Portrayals and Values in Network TV Commercials,* unpublished Master's thesis, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

[34]I. Glasser, "Television and the Construction of Reality," in Oskamp, *Television as a Social Issue,* 44–51.

[35]J. C. Condry and C. Scheibe, *The Role of Familiarity in Social Perception: A Study of Television Drama* (forthcoming).

[36]One analysis suggests that the wide popularity of Archie Bunker of the television program "All in the Family" came from both ends of the political spectrum. Many viewers agreed with Archie because he reflected their opinions; many others viewed him as a character to be ridiculed. For different reasons he was popular with both. See N. Vidmar and M. Rokeach, "Archie Bunker's Bigotry: A Study in Selective Perception and Exposure," *Journal of Communication* 24 (1) (1974): 35–47.

[37]J. C. Wright, M. St. Peters, and A. C. Huston, "Family Television Use and Its Relation to Children's Cognitive Skills and Social Behavior," in J. Bryant, ed., *Television and the American Family* (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1990), 227–52.

[38]"And shall we just carelessly allow children to hear any casual tales which may be devised by casual persons, and to receive in their minds ideas for the most part the

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very opposite of those which we should wish them to have when they are grown up?," Plato, *The Republic,* translated by Francis M. Cornford, Book II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 69.

[39]The Broadcasting Act of 1934 granted the Federal Communications Commission the power to license radio and television stations, assigning them an exclusive position on the electromagnetic band. Aside from a few regulatory rules, the only provision of the law was that the broadcasting license be used to "serve the public interest." See, for example, Condry, *The Psychology of Television,* 9–10. See also W. B. Emery, *Broadcasting and Government: Responsibilities and Regulations* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1971); and G. Tuchman, *The TV Establishment: Programming for Power and Profit* (Englewood N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978), especially 1–39.

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Richard A. Shweder

"Why Do Men Barbecue?" and Other Postmodern Ironies of Growing Up in the Decade of Ethnicity

PREAMBLE

I ONCE HAD LUNCH WITH MARGARET MEAD at an American Anthropological Association meeting. It was a round-table event. The year was 1971. Someone asked her, "Which society is the best place to raise children?" "Not so fast," Mead replied. "It depends if it is a boy or a girl. If it's a boy I would raise him in England, send him off to one of those public schools and get him away from his mother. If it's a girl I would raise her in America, right here, right now in the thick of the women's liberation movement. This is the best time ever for a girl to be alive."

I do not know how Margaret Mead would reply to that same question today, twenty years later, when the images of reality and ideals for flourishing made up by the women's movement are so various (from liberal feminism to tantric goddess worship, from inventing "parenting" to rediscovering "motherhood") and when the very idea of what it means to grow up as an American is being contested along religious, racial, and ethnic lines.

But I think I know how I would reply: There is no single best place to be raised, whether you are a boy or girl, but one of the really good places to be raised is any place where you learn that there is no single best place to be raised, whether you are a boy or a girl. I call that place "postmodern humanism," and in this essay I try to take you there.

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The essay is not directly about "America's Childhood." It is about the way "difference" is pathologized, medicalized, demonized or criminalized in public policy debates about normal family life, healthy life styles, and proper ways for parents to bring up their children. It is about the Puritanism inherent in the desires of those in the public health and public policy arena who want to make progress against the male-female relationships, kinship traditions, sexual patterns, and family life practices of whole segments of American society. It is about the responsibilities of an anthropology and cultural psychology of childhood in the postmodern world. It is about the ironies of life in America in its decade of ethnicity.

"IT'S A CULTURAL THING"

It is widely known that at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland the 1990s is the decade of the brain and the genome project. Less widely appreciated is the fact that at many other institutions where research agendas are discussed and defined, the 1990s is the decade of ethnicity and world culture comparisons. For a variety of reasons—the long-term consequences of the 1964 United States Immigration Laws and the debates over "multiculturalism"; the decline in the authority of the hegemonic bureaucratic state and the reemergence of primordial "tribal" identifications; the economic success associated with the practices and values of Japanese society—there is a mounting concern in the social science academy to examine ethnic, cultural, class, and gender-based diversity in health and human development outcomes, to "internationalize" or diversify social and psychological theory, and to raise questions about "voice" and "authority" in the authorship of science. In forums such as the Social Science Research Council, the Russell Sage Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and among others, difficult and even unsettling questions about the facts of cultural variety are being posed as the social sciences undertake to develop new theoretical and ethical conceptions of diversity based on recent research.

Another sign of these times in which questions of ethnicity and cultural differences are very much in the air is the reemergence of a new interdisciplinary subfield called "cultural psychology" at the interface of anthropology, psychology, and linguistics.[1] Cultural psychology is concerned with the way culture and psyche make each

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other up. It seeks to understand why so many apparently straightforward questions about human psychological functioning (for example, Under what conditions does classroom learning take place?; Are there basic human emotions?; What is the relationship between the sacred and the profane in human choice behavior?) have not resulted in consensual responses among qualified scientists, and why so many generalizations about the cognitive, emotional, and somatic functioning of one particular and very self-privileging population (the contemporary, secularized, urban Euro-American white middle class) have not traveled well across sociocultural, historical, and institutional fault lines.

The premises of cultural psychology are pluralistic in spirit—there is no single population, for example, urban white middle-class Euro-Americans, whose experiences, practices, and ideals can be presumed to be a universal normative base line for health and human development—that Western social science theories are codifications of Western perspectives which may have integrity as ethnotheories but should not be universally authorized over the various other ethnopsychological and ethnosociological theories of the world.

I have been inspired to write this essay by the very idea of a discipline called cultural psychology, by my enthusiasm for its mission to "internationalize" social and psychological theory, and by my belief that in the postmodern world no mission can be important that is lacking in irony.

This essay is in three parts. Its final concern is to discuss the importance of anthropology and cultural psychology as antidotes to the neo-Puritanism of current public policy debates about family life practices and children's lives in the United States. The intermediate concern of the essay is to focus the discussion of family life on the gender ideologies of different ethnic groups. The essay begins, however, by locating anthropology and cultural psychology within the context of contemporary postmodern discourse, a discourse which is by character, if not by nature, deeply ironical.

In this case, the irony begins with the very idea of the "internationalization" of social and psychological theory. One quickly discovers in multicultural and international arenas that, from the perspective of many scholars and intellectuals from Third World countries, to "internationalize" theory means to have access to Western journals, institutions, and resources and to contribute au-

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thoritatively to the formation of precisely that social science theory in the West which many First World intellectuals in New York, Boston, and Chicago view as ethnocentric. From the perspective of many First World scholars and intellectuals, however, to "internationalize" theory is to give voice to precisely those Third World indigenous theories and paradigms which many Third World intellectuals view as backward, superstitious, fundamentalist, and archaic.

Over the last few years, at various meetings of men and women and representatives of majority and minority groups from First and Third World countries, I have found that the indigenous "voice" of the Third World is most likely to be voiced by a Westerner, while the voice of Western theory often comes straight out of Africa or Japan. The effect of all that intellectual place switching is to induce a sense of metaphysical jet lag across genders, cultures, and continents and to open up a conversation about the full range of interpretive possibilities for thinking about the significance of "difference." At such meetings, phrases such as "speaking as a woman," "speaking as a man," "speaking as a Westerner" take on new meaning, which is to say no meaning at all, as a multiplicity of perspectives dissolves any unitary voice. Tongues keep getting twisted in the middle of every pitch. As we enter the 1990s, the time has become ripe for a heightened self-consciousness about the ironical nature of "difference" in this decade of ethnicity and world culture comparisons.

The essay that follows is informal and literary in style, which is one way to be serious when taking a look at the sardonic face of the diversity of intellectual and political viewpoints in the postmodern world. The usual disclaimers apply. As I try to give character to the problem of diversity and the voice of irony, I will be advocating a position which might be described as postmodern humanism or "universalism without the uniformity." Because it is no longer possible these days for any one person to speak with a single voice, I cannot pretend to speak for everyone else, for anyone else or even for all sides of my self. The best I can do is try to speak for one kind of citizen in our ethnically self-conscious world.

How ethnically self-conscious? I recently found myself in the American West in the Salt Lake City Airport, in transit, where I was unable to locate a single Hispanic person and the only African-American in sight was Michael Jordon, on the television screen in the airport bar. Feeling a bit oppressed by the conspicuous racial and

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ethnic homogeneity of the place, I boarded my plane. As the steward served drinks, the pilot's voice came over the public address system. The pilot made the usual welcoming remarks, concluding his speech with these words: "If us in the cockpit can help, please let us know." I smiled at the steward and asked, "Did he really say if *us* in the cockpit can help. . . . " The steward replied, "It's a cultural thing, as you will see when you leave the plane." Could it be that the concept of "culture," expressed through a catch phrase ("it's a cultural thing"), has begun to emerge as a progressive lay idea and perhaps even as a partial antidote to racist interpretations of "difference"? In the contemporary world, it is us experts in the cockpit who are in danger of lagging behind, unless we can find a way to map anthropology into the emerging postmodern scene.

THE POSTMODERN SCENE: SANTA CLAUS NAILED TO A CROSS

Perhaps there was a time in the mythic past when the anthropological "other" was pristine, unitary, alien, and lived very far away. If so, things have changed. In the postmodern world that commerce has helped to create, the anthropological "other" is sophisticated, multiplex, near at hand, and deeply embedded in the bureaucratic institutions of the world system. Anthropology is no longer the discipline that adduces good reasons for the customs of others, which they cannot adduce for themselves. United Airlines, CNN, a Visa card, and Western perspectives have usually gotten there first, or are soon to arrive, and encounters between cultures over questions of "authority," "voice," and "paradigm comparisons" more often than not have the feel of a segment from the Monty Python Show.

A few years ago, for example, I heard a story from Clifford Geertz about a visitor to Japan who wandered into a department store in Tokyo, at a time when the Japanese had begun to take a great interest in the symbolism of the Christmas season. And what symbol of the Christmas season did the visitor discover prominently on display in the Tokyo department store? Santa Claus nailed to a cross!

When I first heard that story, I opened a "Santa Claus nailed to a cross" file, which has grown over the years. Some people think that in the postmodern world words have no reference or validity and you can never know quite what you are talking about. When I look at my file, I feel reassured that in our postmodern world truth is still

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stranger than fiction, even as it has become more difficult to pin things down. Here are some other entries from the file.

There is an entry about a South Asian Indian woman, married to an American, who applied for US citizenship so that her father who had lived all his life in the Third World could join the American Peace Corps. At the final stage of being "naturalized" in New York, the immigration officer said to her, "Do you swear that you will bear arms in defense of the Constitution of the United States?" Compounding the irony of her situation she replied, "No, I won't do that." He asked, "What do you mean?" She said, "I am a pacifist. I don't believe in killing." He said, "Who taught you that?" She said, "Mahatma Gandhi." He said, "Who is he?" She said, "A great Indian religious leader." He said, "Well, you will have to get a note from him." She said, "I can't, he is dead." He said, "Well, get a note from whoever took his place."

There is a parallel entry in my file about an American scholar trained as a "symbolic anthropologist" who sought official research permission to do work among the Maori people of New Zealand. As part of the official procedure he found himself interrogated by a "native," a Maori with an Oxford Ph.D. in anthropology, who was a gatekeeper for the tribe and who had some doubts about the "Chicago school" of symbolism as a way to represent the beliefs and practices of "others."

There is an entry in my file about a prominent member of an East African tribe, a professional philosopher, who had an interest in reviving traditional practices. As it turned out, the old ways and customs had been discarded and forgotten even by the elders of his tribe. The main repository of knowledge about the past was located in ethnographies published in Europe and the United States. He realized he needed a Western anthropologist as a consultant. He had no difficulty finding someone to take the job.

There is an entry about the origin of the English word "juggernaut," which is used in the Anglo-American world to mean "a massive inexorable force or object that crushes anything that is in its path." It just so happens that Juggernaut lives in a temple in the town of Puri on the East Coast of India about 40 miles from where I do anthropological fieldwork. He is in fact a beneficent god, the ninth reincarnation of the Hindu god Vishnu, the protector of the universe. Once a year Juggernaut gets sick, recovers from his illness, and then

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goes on a vacation to visit his maternal aunt at her temple a mile or so down the road. A huge chariot is built for the occasion (in fact three chariots because he is accompanied by his sister and half-brother). Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims come to Puri on the designated day in June or July to pull the chariot and gain religious merit. It is a wild topsy-turvy event, full of jest, complaint, and celebration in which all caste boundaries are relaxed and everyone is equal before god. Occasionally in the tumult someone is injured (and in the past perhaps even killed) under the wheels of the chariots. When, during colonial rule, the British first witnessed the event, they mistook it for a human sacrifice. Hence the image, now enshrined in the English language, of a vicious yet irresistible force crushing things in its wake. Sometimes when one gazes from a distance through ethnocentric lenses across ethnic fault lines things can seem quite the opposite from what they are.

There is an entry in my file about the organizers of a cultural festival in Los Angeles, who lost funding from the Korean government when they decided to "represent" Korea with a performance by indigenous shamans rather than with the ballet company proposed by the Korean government. The Thai community of Los Angeles was also offended because the festival featured a classical dance troupe from Cambodia but only popular street theater from Thailand.[2] The distinction between high and low, primitive and modern is not peculiar to the West. It seems that these days it is largely in the West that people get nervous when the idea of a hierarchy of taste and value is invoked. We prefer to talk about "popular" culture.

There is an entry about all those incredible ethnographic accounts from New Guinea, where in the highlands the men avoid women, and in the lowlands young men inseminate each other in homosexual rites, and here and there married men, loathing the pollution of the sexual act, induce themselves to vomit or bleed their noses after making love to their wives and before returning to the men's hut. Such accounts have had prominence in the lore of anthropology, yet, after a few years of contact with the West, almost everything that was exotic about New Guinea seems to have disappeared. Anthropologists go back to their field sites to discover that no one knows the names for plants anymore or cares very much for the old rituals. Everyone is going to school so that they can have access to jobs, manufactured goods, and T-shirts from the "Hard Rock Cafe." The

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sexual symbolism and avoidance customs of the culture seemed very deep indeed, until they just went away.

There is an entry in my file drawn from a *New York Times* review[3] of a Bill Moyers' program "The Arab World," which the reviewer, Walter Goodman, describes as "a benign attempt to counter the stereotype of the ugly Arab that has been circulating in recent years." Various scholars of, and spokespersons for, the Middle East argue that apparent emblems of oppression (for example, the female head scarf) are merely a matter of style, that Christianity and Islam share the same fundamental ideals, and that the Arab world is on the road to democracy and social justice. The reviewer notes that ". . . Mr. Moyers seems glad to hear the good news" and that the effect of the program "is as intellectually stimulating as one of those 'we're all different but we're all the same' celebrations in junior high school."

And there are many personal entries. In 1982, for example, I was living in what I thought was a relatively remote district of India when television first landed. It immediately became a dowry item in arranged marriages and a basic necessity demanded by women in purdah. I was invited to watch the unveiling of a television set in a traditional household. What was the first image to appear on the tube? An old segment from "I Love Lucy." Lucy was out on a blind date with a duck hunter. I was asked to explain.

Some time later I was in Manhattan watching cable television with a parochial "Westerner." As I flipped stations what did I discover? News from New Delhi and a segment from the Hindu epic *The Ramayana*. I was asked to explain. I flipped channels again. There was a Japanese soap opera, heavily scripted with facial displays of shyness, embarrassment, and self-effacing apologetic dialogue ("I am sorry for dominating our children," and "I am sorry for this and especially sorry for that."). With "public access" to our living rooms, there is more and more to explain, and it is less and less clear how to take a stand on questions of fact and value without seeming hegemonic, dogmatic or prejudiced. It is less and less clear whether prejudgment is always such a bad thing.

My friend, the literary critic, Anatole Broyard used to tell his writing students, "Hang on to your prejudices, they are the only taste you have got." Almost everyone in the academy these days has heard of the continental dictum that it is our prejudices that make it possible for us to see, which means that in thinking, as in life, if you

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do not fix a starting point you'll never get started. Broyard, who sensed our postmodern predicament and knew how to express it with grace and wit, formulated the aphorism this way: "Paranoids are the only ones who notice things anymore."[4] Nietzsche-like he understood that any prejudice is better than no prejudice at all, and that in a postmodern world of cable television and metaphysical jet lag, the best one can do is stay on the move, keeping your options for prejudice open while developing some sensibility or at least some good sense.

Unfortunately too many have misunderstood such exciting deconstructive insights. They have drawn the conclusion that the authority of a voice or viewpoint has little to do with what is said and everything to do with who says it. They have overlooked the fact that you do not have to be a Westerner or a male to articulate a Western or masculine perspective, and that most Westerners and most males are not very good at it anyhow. Authoritative voices, one is tempted to say, speak for the muse, and you know such voices speak for the muse not because of who they are, least of all their social designation, but because what they say binds you to a reality.

So, with regard to the problem of "difference," what are the options for prejudice, the starting points, the interpretive moves, the authoritative voices on the current theory scene?

One option, and it is an option with a distinguished pedigree, is to reify the other. That is the approach of most "structuralisms" and other modernist accounts of "otherness." When I visited with Claude Levi-Strauss for the first and only time in Paris in 1990, he told me that he hears the term "postmodern" all the time but does not understand what it means, and that he would have preferred to live before the twentieth century, before the postmodern era. "But where in the world would you have preferred to live in the past?," I asked, thinking of Athens in the fifth century B.C., India at the time of Buddha, and all those famous cultures of the world—the Nuer, the Dani, the Bororo, the Samoans, the Trobriand Islanders—studied by anthropologists. "In France, of course," Levi-Strauss replied. "Why France?," I asked. "Because French subjectivity is the only subjectivity I can ever understand," he replied. "But what about all those other cultures you have studied all your life? Can't you enter into their subjectivity?," I asked. "No," he replied: "I can only understand other cultures as objects, not as subjects."

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I had a better understanding of postmodernism after that meeting with Levi-Strauss. If postmodern scholarship has done nothing else, it has reduced the distance between the subjectivity of the anthropologist and his or her anthropological object (or is it "subject"?) and persuaded us to revalue the here and the there, the then and the now, the self and the other as an artful (not "literal" and certainly not "fanciful") product of the human imagination. Within the terms of that artful project there are other options for the representation of self and otherness besides treating the other as a thing.

One option is to treat the other as really very much like the self. There are anthropologists—Roger Keesing of Australia National University is among the most articulate—who believe that the differences between peoples have been exaggerated by anthropologists, that anthropologists "choose the most exotic possible cultural data" as their texts and "give them the most exotic possible readings,"[5] and that there is a kind of primary knowledge of the world shared by all peoples, a common sense that is both common and sensible.

A second option is to treat the other as an unsophisticated version of the self, as the dark age, superstitious and confused predecessor to our enlightenment. Ernest Gellner of the University of Cambridge[6] is a colorful exponent of this developmental point of view, which argues that the world woke up and became good for the first time in the West about three hundred years ago, when magic disappeared and when it was finally realized that sticks and stones can break your bones but words can never harm you. Gellner's view plays rather poorly in the capitals of Western anthropology, where the idea of constituted realities, performative utterances, and other forms of "word magic" are very much in vogue, but rather well in the relatively disenchanted capitals of the Third World, among the Westernized or Westernizing elite.

A third option is to go native or indigenous, as articulated by my University of Chicago colleague McKim Marriott:

> . . . the social sciences used in India today have developed from thought about Western, rather than Indian cultural realities. As a result although they pretend to universal applicability, the Western sciences often do not recognize and therefore cannot deal with the questions to which many Indian institutions are answers.[7]

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Marriott went on to argue that "All social sciences develop from thought about what is known to particular cultures and are thus 'cultural' or 'ethno-' social sciences in their origins. All are initially parochial in scope." He proposed for India a new set of social science concepts and ideas derived from the parochial realities known to Indian people.

The irony of Marriott's approach, which has not gone unnoticed in India, is that Marriott is an "outsider" who seems more appreciative of the indigenous perspective of "others" than are many "insiders," who are in fact members of the Westernizing elite. But that is just the beginning of the irony. The "insiders," mostly literati who are somewhat distanced from the traditional cultural realities that Marriott has in mind, disagree with each other about who is really "inside." Do "Indian cultural realities" sum up to a Hindu social science or a Muslim social science? And what about the Jains? Who gets credit for it? And how can Marriott even understand Indian ethnosociology unless he is in some sense an "insider" too. Perhaps the distinction between inside and outside is not so clear, as any respectable Indian ethnotheory ought to assert. Perhaps parochial concepts and ideas can, after all, actually have a more universal appeal.

Indeed, at the end of his essay Marriott himself contrasts "conventional Western social science," which he believes grows out of Western theology, law, and common sense, with "the [Western] findings of current linguistics, of molecular and atomic physics, of ecological biology, and of social systems theory," which he believes are quite compatible with the parochial assumptions of a Hindu social science. In the end—if there is an end—it turns out that the radical relativism of Marriott's ethnotheory agenda is merely apparent, for if we look in the right place, the parochial "other" can be found well within ourselves.

In other words, in this postmodern ironical world that international trade has helped to create in which the inside is out (Coca Cola is everywhere) and the outside is in (the Japanese own Rockefeller Center), a new kind of humanism has begun to emerge. Going native amounts to traveling abroad or across ethnic boundaries to find some suppressed aspect of the self valued and on public display in another land or neighborhood, which one can then bring back as theoretical or cultural critique. The unity of human beings is no longer to be found in that which makes us common and all the same, but rather in a universal original multiplicity which makes each of us so

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variegated that "others" become fully accessible and imaginable to us through some aspect or other of our own complex self.

Postmodern humanism—this universalism without the uniformity—challenges us to do several apparently contradictory things. The contradiction is, however, merely apparent because we never do those things all at once, or with the same breath or in the same frame of reference. Postmodern humanism advises us to restrict the scope of our generalizations to local cultural worlds. It grants us permission to cultivate our prejudices so that we can see (there is *something* to be said in favor of "close mindedness," as a limit on nihilism). Yet it also entices us to stay on the move between alternative prejudices, leaving ourselves open to be astonished by the integrity and value of alien things. It seeks to move the human imagination across great divides in cultural tastes, likes, preferences, and sensibilities, to make it possible for us to comprehend and value each other without requiring that we be the same. It still remains to be seen how this postmodern humanism—this universalism without the uniformity—will fully take shape and for which tribes it will be seen as a thing of great worth.

WHY DO MEN BARBECUE?: NOMADIC VERSUS SETTLED SENSIBILITIES

On a worldwide and historical scale, one of the greatest divides in cultural sensibilities is over the nature and significance of gender relationships and their implications for family life and the rearing of children. Across that divide—a divergence in tastes, likes, and preferences that has been replicated within contemporary American society—we confront each other as alien beings, lacking integrity and value. In what follows I try to restore some value and integrity to the alien voices on both sides of the fault line, by privileging a postmodern humanistic voice and staying on the move between different subcultural realities. It is in the nature of things in the postmodern world that if I manage to succeed at all, my success can only be partial.

In this section of the essay I will propose a distinction between nomadic versus settled sensibilities. The proposal is an idealization, or more accurately a typification of the ideas and ideals of two kinds of cultural worlds. I am going to build a hypothetical model of two types of tastes.

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As everyone knows, Ruth Benedict distinguished Appolonian from Dionysian sensibilities.[8] More useful, however, I believe, in the grand historical scheme of things and as a key to the varieties of contemporary cultural sensibilities and judgments, is the distinction between nomadic versus settled sensibilities. Putting aside everything else, it seems reasonable to imagine that everything follows from that distinction.

A nomadic sensibility does not like a distinction to settle in or become neatly bounded; while, in contrast, a settled sensibility does not like a distinction to wander or become blurred. Thus, one way to classify a people or ethnic group as nomadic or settled is to find out how they handle a fundamental social distinction like male versus female or parent versus child. What, for example, do they do with boys and girls as they enter puberty? Do they push them together or do they pull them apart? If there is any single best key to cultural sensibilities, I would wager that is the one.

Some ethnic groups, those with nomadic sensibilities, not wanting a distinction to settle in, seem to take a special pride in pushing little boys and girls together as they mature. Along with puberty comes parties, dating, "going together," dancing, kissing games. Later it is "human kind" instead of "mankind," "parenting" instead of "mothering," "it" instead of he or she, grown-ups holding hands in public, and adults who now come in "couples," sleeping together exclusively in the same room and preferably in the same bed. Then the penultimate collapse of the barrier between female and male space: male occupation of the kitchen—indoor cooking human style. Liberal feminists (who are sometimes disparaged by other feminists as "me too" feminists) are appreciative of such groups.

Other ethnic groups, those with settled sensibilities, are more fond of the potentialities for symbolism latent in the contrast between male and female. They take special pride in the difference and separateness of the realms. Along with puberty comes menstrual seclusion, purdah, female cults, female secrets, a muse, a temptress, a witch. The very ground on which you walk becomes a goddess or an earth mother. Later, men and women avoid each other, husband and wife keep their distance, at least in public. Men have their clubs, houses, and rituals, and perhaps even a room or bed of their own. Women do not barbecue. Men stay out of the kitchen. Ecological feminists,

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goddess worshipers, and other "tantrics" are fascinated by such groups, in which there is no way to simply "add women and stir."

The distinction between nomadic versus settled sensibilities is, of course, about ideal types, not pure empirical realities, and, of course (it ought to go without saying) there is much that cannot be captured by any simple dichotomy. In the multiethnic pluralistic society that is America today, there are residues and cultural trace elements from many different times and places. While it is important in understanding our contemporary society to recognize that there has been no uniform meltdown of cultural tastes into a single American ideal, it is also important to recognize that settled and nomadic sensibilities do not always live entirely separate lives, except as ideal types.

Within my own local cultural world, in my own particular segment of American society, for example, there are many things my friends and other local cultural counterparts do not like. They do not like the idea of living with their parents. They do not like the idea of their children addressing them as "Sir" or "Madam" or the idea of sleeping in the same bed with their children or separate from their spouse. They do not like the idea of teenagers getting pregnant, and even less the idea of a pregnant teenager actually carrying her baby to term. They would not like it if they heard a woman disparage menses as "the curse." They do not like the idea of "sin." They find it loathsome to even contemplate the Iranian practice of a mother or grandmother kissing the genitals of an infant boy to stimulate his growth and virility. They do not like physical punishment for their children. They would view it as cruel and unusual punishment if any father behaved to his son the way Rabbi (Reb) Saunders, following family tradition, behaved to his ten year old boy Danny in Chaim Potok's novel *The Chosen,* by refusing to have any conversations with him for eleven years (from age ten to twenty-one), except in the context of Torah study. They would reject without hesitation the (Gnostic?) doctrine advanced by the Hassidic Rabbi in his defense of father-son silence that "A man is born into this world with only a tiny spark of goodness in him. The spark is God, it is the soul; the rest is ugliness and evil, a shell."[9] My local cultural corelatives think that life and this worldliness is basically beautiful, good, and just. They think it is only fair for everyone, male and female, to be treated equally even to the extent of sharing equally in all tasks and household chores.

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If it is possible to be taken seriously without being taken too literally, I have begun to suspect in recent years that in many of those moral tastes concerning relationships between men and women and parents and children there are hints of a recapturing of distant sensibilities, from a time when societies were younger, flexible, and on the move. That was before people settled down and before all things—from "mother earth" to housewives—got put in their place. It was before the invention of the "Irish marriage." (In her recent study of Irish perceptions of family relationships and their consequences for psychological well-being, Maria Sullivan takes note: "One woman recounted that a couple she knows are considered by everyone to have a 'great' marriage, despite the generally known fact that they haven't spoken to each other in twelve years.")[10] I have wondered from time to time whether the likes of my friends in my local cultural world, in my local segment of American society, might be interpreted as a return of the current to where it started, in a nomadic frame of mind.

In reality, of course, the cultural nomadism of my local cultural world is far from complete, and within any actual community at any point in time nomadic tastes and institutions and settled tastes and institutions may coexist. For example, in the communities where I live women do not barbecue. That "settled" practice—men and women behaving towards each other as though there were two kinds of space, indoor female space and outdoor male space, and as though women were obliged to stay in the home—manages to live side by side with more "nomadic" practices, but not happily. Empirical social reality is not a straight line or a homogeneous enclosed space and it is possible to mix up one's ideal types just as it is possible to mix up one's metaphors.

One harbors the suspicion, however, that when settled sensibilities and nomadic sensibilities live side by side in the same sensibility, as they sometimes do, they do so unhappily or a bit uncomfortably. For contemporary nomadic common sense, the sexual division of barbecuing, whereby women who are the equals of their husbands and who do not typically stay close to home, never cook when the family hearth goes outdoors, is something of an embarrassment, a shameful confusion of ideal types, or at the very least a good topic for conversation.

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I am more than aware, of course, that some postmodernists, those who are so deeply skeptical they aspire for (or at least write about) a life of radical eclecticism in which the desire for consistency plays *no* part, would not acknowledge something as logical as "a shameful confusion of ideal types" as a real state of mind. Such postmodern skepticism to the contrary, I am skeptical of radical eclecticism, both as a description of the way lives are lived and as an ethical ideal. "Santa Claus nailed to a cross," a symbol for eclecticism and an eclectic symbol, if there ever was one, is an example of a droll disaster in understanding or it is a parody, but it is not a self-sustaining cultural form. Social reality is not a straight line or a neatly enclosed homogeneous space but neither is it a scatter of unrelated or random points.

Scientists are fond of saying that it does not matter where your hypothetical model comes from. What matters is whether it is useful. My model is of two types of cultural sensibilities, the nomadic and the settled, which are revealed by whether adolescence is choreographed and experienced as "kissing games" or as "purdah." The nomadic sensibility tramples across those boundaries, male versus female, parent versus child, old versus young, that the settled mentality tries hard to maintain. I do not know whether my hypothesis is useful or true (although I certainly feel it deserves to be), but I am relieved to know that its past will not be held against it.

The first time the hypothesis came to my mind I was thinking about the goddess Durga. That is not too surprising since at the time I was living in an orthodox Hindu temple town in India. The goddess Durga in her many guises, all addressed as "mother," is a force to be dealt with in such communities. According to local "historians," the goddess killed a notorious and previously invulnerable demon who had been terrorizing the gods. Dancing before the demon, Durga exposed her genitals, a celestial striptease. He looked, lost his powers, turned to jelly. She killed him. Freud told us it is the father who is powerful and dangerous. In India I learned it can be the mother who is dangerous, and if you ever actually manage to see through her sari, who knows what might happen to you? Let father take her from your eyes, before Oedipus-like you have to pluck them out. Hindu men are convinced that women are so powerful they may be hazardous to your health. Hindu women are convinced that if they do not reign in their power and rage, the entire universe might be destroyed. A. K.

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Ramanujan,[11] of the University of Chicago, a scholar of Indian literature and folklore, has even proposed that in India there is an inversion of the Oedipus complex. The son does not rebel against the father to get the mother. Instead the father makes the son an offer too good to refuse: give me your virility and I will give you immorality. The son does it, willingly.

Power is closely related to separateness and secrecy, and, in South Asian ethnic communities, women guard their separateness or have it guarded for them. In one famous story, the goddess posts a sentry, her son Ganesh, at the threshold of her bedroom with instructions to keep out all intruders, especially her husband. It is purdah in defense of the mystique and power of the unknown. In India, and perhaps everywhere, what you do not know just might hurt you.

Where myth ends and reality begins is difficult to say, but almost anywhere in India where one looks, male and female keep their distance. The orthodox do not mix their metaphors or their genres. According to doctrine, the earth is female; once a year she menstruates and is bathed ritually. Yet, if a women were to pierce the ground with a plow iron, the earth would quake in natural distress, or so it is believed. The kitchen is female space. Women cook, except outdoors. Husband and wife do not eat together, or present themselves as a "couple" to their public. The sacred thread ceremony, a Brahman's analogue to a Bar Mitzvah, is an all male event. Women keep their own secrets. My close orthodox friends are male; I can have no other kind. In intimate conversations they confess that really, when you get down to it, there are only two castes, male and female, and if each keeps to its proper ways, the age of truth will dawn. The women agree. Orthodox Hindus know what it means to keep male and female apart, and they understand the advantages. The distinction between male and female has settled in.

The second time I thought about my hypothetical model was just after I had said "Yes" to my seminomadic then thirteen year old son. A dance party in the basement. Thirty Hyde Park children, girls and boys, spinning the bottle, "randomly" finding their way, and each other, in the dark. I wondered how I could ever explain it all to my orthodox Hindu friends. This was not the age of truth.

The third time the hypothesis came to my mind I was barbecuing. I was sure my Hindu friends would approve. Their nature was in order.

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Their nature is not the nature of a people on the move. The seminomadic sensibility does not like a distinction to settle in. Nomads feel a moral imperative to uproot. In nomad common sense, if you cannot rid yourself of a persistent natural distinction like male versus female, the least you can do is ignore it: hold hands, take a walk, pick up and go somewhere—together. I once explained to my "postmodern" nomadic then eight year old daughter the expression, "Vive la difference!". "Daddy," she replied commonsensically, "even the stupidest things have meaning."

Get-your-roots-in-the-ground, earth-bound peoples do not see it that way. For them it is the only difference that makes a difference. They know you can not get rid of the contrast between male and female, so why not help it settle in? Over several decades the Israeli Kibbutz movement tried very hard to erase distinctions based on sex. Melford Spiro in his book, *Gender and Culture,*[12] has described the experiment; it did not work. Stray marks remained on the tabula rasa of human nature. Pubescent girls did not like taking showers in front of boys. Boys gravitated to tractors. Girls ended up in the mess.

The resplendent male versus female symbolism of the earth-bound peoples has all but faded from consciousness in my own local cultural world, where today there is not much enchantment or danger left in semen and blood. In other local cultural worlds, in Hindu villages in India, for example, forty drops of breast milk make one drop of blood. Forty drops of blood make one drop of semen, the ultimate life force, which you do not want to squander away. Vivekananda, the Hindu saint, chaste and hence radiant, died and transcended to glory long ago. When he died, legend recounts, his body cracked open in a flood of semen.

Where there is semen and menstrual blood so too there is enchantment and danger, or at least there can be. Gilbert Herdt, in his ethnography *Guardians of the Flute,*[13] describes local belief as it once existed among the Sambia of New Guinea. The Sambia once believed that menstrual blood was a hazard and, if you were a young boy, contact with women would stunt your growth. Seven to ten year old boys were protected from the harmful influence by moving them out of their homes. In a forest of male space, for ten years forbidden all contact with women, including their mothers, preadolescent and adolescent boys built strong bodies in eight ways by inseminating each other in homosexual rites. A bizarre and incomprehensible

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practice? Margaret Mead, quite unwittingly, helped me see the point. Remember her comment about the best place to grow up if you are a boy. Perhaps in New Guinea they knew what they are doing. They got the boys away from their mothers, all right. All they seemed to lack was the English public school.

By now it is probably obvious to the reader that a postmodern humanistic perspective on nomadic versus settled sensibilities sums up to a single point: viewed in the abstract, as ideal types, they should be thought of as multiple equilibria states, as coequal even if divergent forms. In other words, it is not necessary or useful to try to assimilate them to some Enlightenment picture of progressive cultural development. There is no history to be narrated of a destined substitution or replacement of one sensibility by the other, tied to a successful struggle of reason over superstition, affluence over poverty, sophistication over innocence, modern sensibilities over tradition-laden sensibilities. When one tries to make sense of the relationship between the two types of sensibilities, the image of a straight line inclined upward does not work very well.

Recall for a moment that enlightenment origin myth about the linear ascent of human beings. It goes something like this. You start by contemplating some rudimentary go-out-and-hunt-fish-and-gather-dinner-for-yourself kind of place. Bushmen, Eskimos, Pygmies flash to mind. Then it is onward and upward through the agricultural civilizations—feudal Europe, rural India, the Orient. Serfs and bondage, darkness and domination, religion, ritual, caste, and taboo. Then the penultimate advance, rebirth, enlightenment, the industrial revolution in the West, with the straight line of progress reaching its temporary pinnacle in the postindustrial, high-tech, ever calculating, always renegotiating, foresightful, flexible ("this is the first day of the rest of your life") rational choice consciousness of America 1992.

I want to suggest that when it comes to evaluating the rationality and staying power of the two types of cultural sensibilities—nomadic and settled—the enlightenment origin myth is probably outdated. Both forms of sensibility are with us in the world today and the nomadic sensibility is probably as old as they get. Indeed when it comes to the choice between nomadic and settled sensibilities, the shape of world history may be more like a series of pendulum swings or U-turns than like a straight line.

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For example, one spouse only, separate household for each young couple type living arrangements were probably in fashion during the earliest periods of human history, and today are quite popular among peoples living in seminomadic bands. Parents in such places have been observed insisting, like members of my own local cultural world, that their children be self-reliant and rebellious, that they learn to do things for themselves, "tie their own shoes," make their own friends, "go off to camp," get out of the house, find their own mate. In the evolution of sensibilities, it is somewhere in between the beginning and end of the U-turn, in those live-with-your-extended-kin, plow-your-fields, house-away-your-wife type places that parent-child relationships became what Ring Lardner fondly remembered, "Shut up! my father explained." One must remember, however, that the "shut up!" commanded in such places and the ordeals and hardship ideologies of such places, even the prohibitions on conversations between father and son in such places, often had a moral force.[14]

On one occasion I have even heard an anthropologist suggest that contemporary dancing—the kind of commotion you find in a disco, linear moves, up-down, back and forth, "let's jump"—has long been the rage in the seminomadic bands. Our more advanced ancestors in India, Indonesia, Polynesia, and Japan keep their feet on the ground, winding and entwining their recurvate movements to a very different kind of sway.

From this curvilinear perspective on cultural change, contemporary liberal feminism with its independent-minded egalitarian self-consciousness might be viewed as a return to a form of cultural sensibility that preceded intensive agriculture and fixed dwellings. Nomadic !Kung Bush women, for example, did not have to stay close to home. They knew their way around in the world, and if they did not go out from time to time to forage for food, there was 50 percent less for everyone to eat.

My point, however, is not to privilege the nomadic sensibility by claiming it as most ancient, any more than I would want to privilege it by claiming it as most recent, or as my own. Instead I want to argue that if we are to divide cultural sensibilities into two types, the key contrast is not likely to line up with received oppositions between darkness and light, superstition and reason, ancient and modern, poverty and affluence, backward and advanced.

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The postmodern humanist view is that cultural sensibilities will probably never fit, or stay, in any one bag or converge into a singular ideal of truth, beauty or goodness. Hegel knew why. Freud knew why. Thesis implies antithesis. The repressed returns. The denied alternative, whether it is push them together or pull them apart, kissing games or purdah, is always off in the wings, waiting to come back on center stage. It is like our politics. First we tolerate offensive regulation in the name of social justice, preparing the way for us to tolerate offensive exploitation in the name of individual liberty. There are just too many "goods" and "truths" in the world, and they cannot all be maximized at once or in the same family, neighborhood or tribe. As soon as we complete one U-turn, we start another. The settled and the nomadic compete for our consciousness, and we vacillate, the first commanding us to put everything in its place, the second not wanting anything to be pinned down. In America we may always be torn between a nomadic thesis and an earth-bound antithesis. It remains to be seen whether it is the entrepreneurs or the bureaucrats, the individualists or the communitarians, the secularists or the fundamentalists who, for the moment, will win the next day or the next election.

THE NEW PURITANISM AND THE CONTEST TO DEFINE CHILDREN'S LIVES

Diversity is always in danger of being turned into a "problem" but it always seems to have its defenders, as well. "Homosexuality" is a case in point. At various times in the Anglo-American world it has been "moralized" as sinful, "criminalized" as illegal, "pathologized" or "medicalized" as sick. Those concerned to defend its integrity have either "nihilized" it as merely a matter of taste, a "gay" life-style, or else, more recently among the thirty and under age set, "naturalized" it as a "queer" yet unavoidable fact of nature, perhaps wired into the brain. Both defensive moves—the extreme subjectivism of the "nihilizers" and the extreme objectivism of the "naturalizers"—remove the "problem" by taking it out of the realm where standards of criticism and moral judgments apply.

Postmodern humanism is also a type of defense of diversity, but it defends diversity from within the realm where standards of criticism and issues of moral responsibility apply. From the perspective of

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postmodern humanism, "difference" is interpreted as a measure of the multiplicity of rational or adaptive forms, each with its own integrity and value which it is the job of the postmodern humanist to identify and spell out.

In *The Closing of the American Mind,* Allan Bloom's important and provocative book denouncing what he sees as the "relativism" of contemporary American society, one finds the following remark: "Progress can be made against cigarette smoking because our absence of standards or our relativism does not extend to matters of bodily health. In all other things the market determines the value."[15] The choice posed by Bloom—between monism and a nihilistic absence of standards—has a distinguished history in political and moral philosophy, but in the context of current public policy debates the supposed "nihilistic" option seems rather remote from everyday calculations. It is not the absence of standards that marks American society in its decade of ethnicity but its plethora of standards, distributed unevenly across local cultural groups. The real and agonizing choice before us seems more like this: whether to support those who want to make "progress" against variety (in food habits, family arrangements, sexual practices, etc.) in the name of societal and personal health, or whether to immunize ourselves against the rhetoric of pathology and disease and be on our guard whenever that rhetoric is used to stigmatize the ideals and practices of whole segments of our hereunto plural society.

My point, of course, is not to justify pathology or engage in the sophistical rationalization of error and ignorance. Error and ignorance do have points that can be raised in their favor (was it not Levi-Strauss who once remarked "superstition is the best antidote to despotism"?) but those are not the points I am raising here. The point I am raising has to do with the integrity of the idea of a cultural norm and the hazards of making progress against "difference" in a pluralistic society such as our own.

The naming and creation of things as "problems" is a fascinating social, cultural, and political process in its own right and with its own rites. How a "problem" gets created is not unrelated to how it gets named or described, which is closely related to which institutions or bureaucracies in our society—criminal, medical, social welfare, artistic, economic—become invested in its maintenance, and which types of people in society (police, psychiatrists, epidemiologists,

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theologians, academics, entrepreneurs, insurance agents) bother about its existence. It is in the context of naming and describing things so as to turn them into "problems" that an anthropological discussion of diversity may have a bearing on contemporary concerns, and may even matter.

Precisely how it may matter can be illustrated, in this case in a breezy sort of way, by Anna Wierzbicka's discussion of variations in responses to compliments in different cultural traditions. Wierzbicka[16] quotes a "Dear Abby" letter to the *Los Angeles Times* written by a man who signs his letter, "Perplexed." The letter reads as follows:

> Dear Abby, My wife has a habit of down-grading sincere compliments. If I say, 'Gee, Hon, you look nice in that dress,' her reply is likely to be, 'Do you really think so? It's just a rag my sister gave me.' Or if I tell her she did a great job cleaning up the house, her response might be, 'Well, I guess you haven't seen the kid's room.' I find it hard to understand why she can't accept a compliment without putting herself down. And it hurts me a little. How do you explain it, Abby?

Abby replies as follows: "Dear Perplexed, Your wife lacks self-confidence and feels somewhat embarrassed to accept praise. Don't be hurt. Most people have difficulty accepting compliments with grace."

Anna Wierzbicka comments on this exchange as follows:

> A crucial point that is missing from Abby's response, however, is that responses to compliments differ from culture to culture, and within a complex society such as the United States they depend not only on people's character traits, such as 'lack of confidence,' but also on their cultural background. It is quite possible that 'Perplexed's' wife did not lack self-confidence or self-esteem but was simply Jewish, or was of Eastern European or perhaps Chinese or Japanese background.

Wierzbicka goes on to remark that when the behavior of a lot of people deviate from an analyst's normative model (for example, in this instance, of the proper or graceful way to accept compliments) then perhaps it is the analyst's model, and not the people's behavior, that is inadequate. In such cases she asks: "Shouldn't one rather speak of a number of different models, operating in different cultures and subcultures?"[17]

How it may matter can also be illustrated, here in a less breezy way, by some comments by Leon Botstein, President of Bard College,

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which he offered in the context of an interview about "sexual harassment" problems at Simon's Rock College, an affiliate of Bard.[18] On the topic of touching and physical contact between students and faculty, Botstein rhetorically asks: "How do you bring people from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and then promulgate a set of puritanical rules which are derived from the most self-righteous American tradition of moralism, from 17th-century New England?" He remarks: "My putting my arm around someone male or female and giving physical and spontaneous expression of my enthusiasms is not necessarily an act of sexual vengeance or propositioning [In fact, as Botstein recounts, his esteemed teacher Hannah Arendt did it to him]." He notes: "The American standard, highly puritan, extremely unexpressive and cold, is not a universal in daily life."

How it may matter can also be illustrated, in this case in a downright riveting way, by reference to Caroline Bletso's study of the moral character of ordeals and hardships in the lives of "foster children"—children living away from their parents and with another family—in a West African culture, among the Mende of Sierra Leone. Bletso begins her essay by pointing out that:

> In family studies, three conditions are often taken as indices of aberrant parental attitudes towards children: willingness to send them away for long periods, neglect of their emotional and physical needs and infliction of harsh treatment such as beating, enforced hard labor or food deprivation.[19]

She then documents the normative and moral character of hunger, fatigue, and misery and a host of other ordeals in the lives of Mende foster children, among a people where at least 33 percent, and perhaps as many as 50 percent, of all children between birth and age sixteen are fostered out by their parents and expected to endure the predictable hardships.

Bletso suggests that we "go beyond the facile label of 'abuse' to understand the cultural logic underlying these practices."[20] The normative logic of Mende culture includes the maxim that there can be no success in life without struggle, which provides a charter for a set of practices including ordeals designed to test the child's capacity for unquestioning loyalty to a potential life-long benefactor or patron. It would be surprising if this well-documented moral tradi-

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tion of West African fosterage and ordeal could not be found in West African ethnic enclaves in the United States.

One thing one is likely to find in many of the African-American ethnic enclaves in the United States (rural and urban) is a set of reproductive and sexual norms and practices that differ from the seventeenth-century New England puritan family ideal and from the local family ideals of most public policy and public health experts. For example, the 1988 US National Survey of Adolescents reports that 69 percent of black youths in the United States have had sexual intercourse by the age of fifteen years, which is two or three times the rate for youths with family histories of immigration from Western Europe; there is also good reason to suspect that it is the African-American community in the United States that is most opposed to abortion.

Although there is a comparative literature on sexual behavior and family patterns across ethnic groups and human populations, it has not played a significant part in recent public policy debates. Can it really be news that the idea of establishing an exclusive monogamous union with a coresident male is a moral conception of reproductive legitimacy that is peculiar to certain local cultural worlds, or that not everyone moralizes the reproductive process in the same way? In other cultural worlds, especially those with ancestral or historical connections to regions of the world where polygamy is a moral ideal and where it is not unusual for 40 percent of the married male population to have had extramarital sexual unions during the previous year and for 33 percent of married women to have had sexual affairs at least once during their married life, "out-of-wedlock" childbirth may have a legitimacy, significance, and payoff of its own, and may display a stability and persistence suggestive of an alternative cultural norm.

Traditions of behavior have a way of persisting and diffusing over time and space. With regard to the "African-American" pattern of sexual and reproductive behavior, it may be provocative but it is not entirely unreasonable to speculate that "it's a cultural thing." Certainly the pattern has been around for a long time. It is only recently that it has been labeled as a social pathology. According to the historian Linda Gordon,

> The Children's Bureau experts knew that southern African Americans had higher rates of out-of-wedlock births from at least the 1920's, but

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> this phenomenon was then seen as a contained, rural, regional pattern, and thus unthreatening, so it remained a very marginal discourse until the 'great migration' brought thousands of blacks to the north. In mid-century social workers began to name Black reproductive behavior as a problem.[21]

Gordon goes on to argue that "Teenage pregnancy is not ruining girls' lives. When teenagers of similarly poor and otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds are compared, there is no evidence that girls who don't get pregnant do any better. The educational difference between teenage mothers and nonmothers is small and declining."[22]

Looking in from the outside, it is not always easy, at first blush, to distinguish error, ignorance, and pathology from a genuine cultural difference in norms and values, yet it makes a great deal of difference that we try. A directly relevant example of the integrity and importance of the idea of a genuine "difference" in cultural norms can be found in a recent study by Thomas Weisner and Helen Garnier[23] of school achievement at the end of the three to eleven age period. The study was part of Thomas Weisner's twelve year longitudinal "Family Life Styles Project" (which he originally cofounded with the late Bernice Eiduson). The aim of the project is to chart the development of Euro-American children from 205 families, who lived in California in the late 1960s. The families span the working-class to upper middle-class socioeconomic status (SES) spectrum. They were selected for study, however, not because of their socioeconomic status but because they differ greatly in household structure and cultural norms, from conventional monogamous married couples to unmarried couples, to single-mother households to communal and collectivist groups of various religious and secular kinds.

The main finding of the Weisner and Garnier study is that, controlling for variations in SES, IQ, and gender, "children in single parent families had similar grades to children in two parent families" and that the children who do best in school are those who come from households (whether "conventional" or nonconventional) with a strong commitment to their family life-style and to a set of values, meanings, and rationales for making sense of their way of life. In other words, when it comes to questions of the well-being of America's children, age three to eleven, growing up in any relatively coherent cultural tradition seems to be better than growing up with

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no tradition at all, and there is more than one cultural logic out of which to fashion a way of life.

It has become a noteworthy feature of public policy debates these days that many analysts who care about the lives of children in America sound like prophets of "gloom and doom," with a ready diagnosis of American society as rife with "pathologies" (teenage pregnancy, "child abuse," sexual promiscuity and "harassment," single-parent families, mindless television watching, etc.) and in desperate need of bureaucratic cures. One problem with these public policy debates about the problems of family life in America is that the meaning of "difference" is itself never fully problematized. Instead the discourse of the debate seems to presuppose the existence of an obvious and unitary set of standards of truth, beauty, goodness, and health, which, far more often than not, are the entrenched standards of the local cultural world in which the public policy "experts" live *their* lives. Behaviors inconsistent with those standards are typically viewed as either ignorant, irrational, abusive, criminal, sick or depraved.

The predictable effect of this mode of interpretation is to stigmatize the ideals and practices of low status or marginalized groups in society, and to inflame a puritanical, even if well-intended impulse to make progress against "difference," under the banner of a righteous campaign against the incubation and contagious spread of an insidious social pathology or disease. There are even contexts (for example, in the area of public health: "substance abuse," cigarette smoking, eating behavior) in which this puritanical sense of righteousness is so powerful that well-intended, even "liberal" folk begin to give off the impression that fat people do not go to heaven, that smokers cannot be trusted because they have "addictive personalities" and that certain practices associated with the Bill of Rights (the freedom of speech and the liberty to advertise) are trivial in comparison to the obvious goods of the public policy agenda, and should be qualified or set aside. It will surely be one of the great ironies of history if one day scholars are able to look back in time and discover that the greatest threat to liberty, democracy, and pluralism in the West turned out to be not the communist menace or the CIA but medical insurance companies and the Public Health Service.

As the discerning reader will have noticed, it is not the point of my essay about the fate of anthropology and cultural psychology in the

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postmodern world to argue the radical romantic tenet that "everything that is, is good." There *are* times when "difference" is a measure of ignorance, irrationality, abusiveness, criminality, sickness or depravity, although not always or even often. Moreover, the fact that the ideals and practices of a cultural community have consequences seems beyond dispute. Those straight-laced, tea toddling, nicotine avoiding Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists, for example, manage to avoid lung cancer and cirrhosis of the liver, and they live, on the average, six years longer than the rest of us. In the disease environment of the contemporary world, puritanical communities may well end up healthier, if not necessarily happier. Nevertheless, when a genuine cultural (that is to say, ethically defensible) difference in norms, ideals, and practices is christened a social "pathology," more often than not something wicked has been done, and it matters a lot that there be some postmodern humanists around who care to have it undone.

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ENDNOTES

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